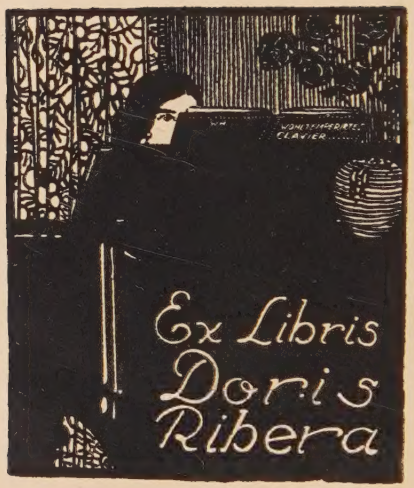
MOUSSORGSKY

M. MONTAGU-NATHAN

MASTERS OF RUSSIAN MUSIC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MOUSSORGSKY

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MASTERS OF RUSSIAN MUSIC

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BY

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NEW YORK

DUFFIELD AND COMPANY

1917

467

To

F. H. S.

17-21122

Printed in England

CONTENTS

PAGE

INTRODUCTION - - - - - - - - 5

PART I

CAREER - - - - - - - - - 13

PART II

MOUSSORGSKY AS OPERATIC COMPOSER - - 45

PART III

CHORAL AND INSTRUMENTAL WORKS - - - 76

PART IV

SONGS - - - - - - - - - 83

LIST OF PRINCIPAL WORKS - - - - - 97

INDEX - - - - - - - - - 98

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MOUSSORGSKY

INTRODUCTION

It would be idle to enter upon a consideration of the life and work of Moussorgsky without first making some attempt to expound his æsthetic outlook. Fortunately this does not involve reference to a library of volumes such as that left by Wagner. The German composer was at considerable pains that the public should know something of his artistic aims, and also, be it said, of his social and political views, and those who approach his music knowing nothing either of its import or of the personality of its composer have only themselves to blame.

With Moussorgsky it is a different matter, especially as regards the British public, who until two or three years ago had no means of obtaining any detailed information about either the man or his work. He leaves nothing behind him in the shape of an artistic confession of faith beyond the few scattered utterances that were delivered in letters to his friends, and even these are for the most part inaccessible to all who have no acquaintance with the Russian tongue. This is the more unfortunate since in England the great Russian composer first became known through one or two entirely uncharacteristic works, examples which either had no artistic significance whatever, or which repre-

sented his views only by their text and not through its musical setting.

In the first category is the "Song of the Flea," which was accorded the quite unmerited honour of being among the first of his works to be brought to England; in the second is "The Peepshow," which consists of a commentary upon, and an exposure of, the prejudices of lesser composers, but which tells us nothing of Moussorgsky's genius, his musical style, or his manner of applying his æsthetic principles in his own compositions.

There must still be a considerable number of British music-lovers to whom Moussorgsky is known as the composer of one or two operas which they have not yet had an opportunity of hearing, of a few songs, and of some examples of symphonic music, such as the popular "Gopak."

It is this section of the public that one addresses when pronouncing Moussorgsky to be one of the very greatest figures in the annals of Music—apart altogether from his creative output. In the world of Art it does not very often happen that a man who formulates principles has a sufficiently commanding creative power to provide his own convincing examples of the application of those principles. As a rule the artist who talks of reforms has not himself been highly endowed with the gift of artistic creation.

In Moussorgsky's art we have the reflection of his own convictions and, what is more, their vindication. But since his works have an appeal which does not depend upon a knowledge of the principles they

embody, there seems sufficient reason for supposing that the creative qualities of the composer are at least equal in value to his æsthetic preconceptions.

The art of Moussorgsky is based upon three fundamental principles: (1) That Art is an expression of humanity, and, like humanity, is in a constant state of evolution; (2) that Art, as such, can therefore have no arbitrary formalistic boundaries; (3) that as the expression of humanity is an office which ought to be carried out with a full sense of the responsibility attaching to those entrusted with it, the artist is called upon to be sincere in any art-work he may undertake.

Anyone who had lived in an artistic environment of his own making, who had never been in touch with an outside world that looks upon Art as a means of whiling away a superfluous hour, who had never known of that problem with which the public artist is continuously being confronted—the problem of how suitably to compromise with the dull-witted section of humanity—would wonder why it should have seemed necessary to Moussorgsky, or anyone else, to propound as his confession of faith a series of such platitudinous axioms. Moreover, in perusing the bare narrative of Moussorgsky's life, one would not discover on the surface anything entitling one to suppose that he in particular should have been able to recognize the need for dwelling upon matters that are to be clearly understood only by those who have never been contaminated by close contact with the World.

It is only between the lines of that narrative that one can discover the key to this mystery.

In other walks of life than Art one hears of the "conversion" of individuals who have hitherto followed the moral line of least resistance. At a certain moment in their lives there has come a sudden awakening, a realization that honesty and decent behaviour as a whole should not be reckoned a policy, but an obligation towards oneself.

A thief may arrive at such a psychological crisis through being brought face to face with a circumstance revealing to him for the first time that it is pleasant to be able to look his neighbour in the eyes. A drunkard, surveying in a sober interval the ruin brought upon his family, may resolve that there must surely be a happy medium of temperance between the states of drunkenness with wine and what Baudelaire called drunkenness with virtue. A great national crisis may open the eyes of a politician so that he will henceforth consider the party principle and his acquiescence in it as the betrayal of a trust.

Such specimens of erring humanity, when awakened to a sense of duty towards themselves and their fellows, are reckoned "converted."

Moussorgsky, in his early days a musical "rake," became a converted musician.

He saw that Music was the sick man of Art, and that his past attitude towards it was not likely to improve its condition. He saw that music is given to man that he may give utterance to emotions inexpressible by words. From this starting-point he was not slow in reaching the conclusion that a nation which is satisfied to depend upon foreign art-products has not yet become

worthy to be reckoned in the full sense a nation; that in conveying ideas which are too subtle for verbal expression, music is ministering not to the mind but to the temperament; and consequently that it would be absurd arbitrarily to confine the expression of the subconscious emotions of one generation within the forms employed by a previous generation. Finally he perceived that, if Art was to be taken seriously as an expression of humanity, it must no longer remain in a condition in which no earnest human being could look upon it other than as a frivolous pastime.

Moussorgsky, once "converted," began to urge the necessity of expressing national aspirations by means of Art, of abolishing the laws that were a mental product of a previous generation and could therefore have no bearing upon the temperamental needs of the present, of emancipating Music from a condition in which its relation towards the other arts was that either of a brutal master, or a lying, though nicely-mannered servant.

There are conventional terms which contain the essence of the qualities considered by Moussorgsky to be indispensable conditions to the welfare of his art. They are Truth, Freedom, and Progress.

The presence of the word Truth upon his banner did not cause a great deal of concern among his contemporaries. They did not recognize that artistic truth was a rarity. But the remainder of the legend seemed to them to aim at the very foundations of the art of Music.

The attitude of musicians towards music in Moussorgsky's day was not strikingly dissimilar from that

observable in the twentieth century. There was a reverence for tradition that was little short of a mania. The older a masterpiece became, the more they venerated it. The best music of the immediately previous generation was tolerated apparently on the ground that it might one day become a classic. Music of the present generation was by common consent ignored. To such as these, therefore, the word Progress seemed to contain a very impertinent challenge. But what of Freedom ? Moussorgsky refused to observe the laws that, according to him, had been formulated for the benefit of those who wished merely to imitate the composers of the past. It is generally assumed that he was too impatient of technique to trouble himself about acquiring any considerable knowledge of it. His complaint that, while he could discuss art with painters and sculptors, he found that musicians never got as far as Art, but confined themselves to questions of technique, explains in some measure his attitude. " Is it," he asks, " because it is my weak point that I hate it ?" This inquiry is not directly answered, but is followed by a justification couched in metaphor. He likens the exploitation of technique to the behaviour of your host who persists in making known to you the ingredients of the delicious pudding he offers you.

It would seem as though Moussorgsky found, in the technical training prescribed for musicians, something which caused the student to contract an ineradicable habit of looking backward. This he considered inimical to the progress of the art.

Naturally, it is urged against him that, as a great deal of his work had to be revised by Rimsky-Korsakof, he himself would have profited had he attained a greater technical proficiency. As to this it is impossible to judge fairly without comparing the originals with Rimsky-Korsakof's versions. When that is done one begins to perceive that a great deal of the so-called "incorrect" or "crude" is music that did not receive the sanction of his contemporaries, or of the immediately succeeding generation, for the simple reason that he was at least three generations ahead of his contemporaries. The advanced musician of the present day is, therefore, protesting against the emendations, because he finds in the original version something that he would himself be proud of having invented.*

But apart altogether from this aspect of the question, if we compare the creative work of the emendator and the emendated, we discover that while Rimsky-Korsakof's most recent music is beginning to sound old-fashioned, Moussorgsky's music of forty years ago is not. From which we are entitled to infer that the music of a composer who happens to be a great genius, though technically deficient, has a greater vitality than the music of one who is a great artist and technically proficient.

If that be a correct inference, it would seem to be in the interests of musical progress that a few partnerships should be arranged between geniuses who are

* In Yastrebtsef's "Recollections of Rimsky-Korsakof" (now in course of serial publication by the *Russian Musical Gazette*), many of the latter's utterances on this subject are recorded.

hampered by a want of technique, and artists whose training has destroyed or marred their prophetic vision.

This would perhaps prove a fruitful means of bringing into the world a store of living music, of music that would not remind us at intervals of some dead and gone composer.

The consideration of Moussorgsky's opinions cannot in any case lessen one's appreciation of his music.

It will be found that whereas many will vehemently contest the validity of Moussorgsky's artistic principles, exceedingly few will hear his music without supreme enjoyment. The acceptation of these principles has been forced upon the musical world on every occasion on which a genius has arisen. But the musical world has apparently never become conscious of having accepted them. It prefers to go on denying the existence of the mountain range in which the stream of great music has its source.

The study of Moussorgsky's life and work affords a rare opportunity of observing that a composer who is frankly a futurist is not necessarily either a fool, a wag, or a knave. For in listening to his music, we of the present generation cannot imagine for the life of us what all the pother was about. It is all quite acceptable. But the principles—which are new to us, and, unlike the music, will always be new to a wicked world—those we cannot ever bring ourselves to uphold !

" When our efforts to put the actual living man in our music are appreciated, . . ." wrote Moussorgsky to his friend Stassof, " then shall we have begun to make progress. . . ."

PART I

CAREER

I.

Modeste Petrovich Moussorgsky was born on March 16th (O.S.), 1839, at Karevo, a village situated in that district (Toropets) of the Pskof Government nearest to the Muscovite boundary. The household at that moment consisted of his father, Pyotr Alexeyevich, a small landowner; his mother, whose maiden name was Shirikof; a brother, Filaret; and the all-important nurse.

The child's surroundings from the very first were such as to contribute most happily to the development of his particular form of genius. His father appears to have enjoyed music, although not displaying any executive ability; his mother was a very fair pianist. For her influence he was never tired of expressing his indebtedness in terms such as leave no room for doubt as to his filial affection. But it was to his nurse, as was the case with Pushkin, that he owed the very seeds of his art. "My nurse," wrote the composer in after years, "made me intimately acquainted with Russian folk-lore." Her stories of the terrible Kashchei, the fearful Baba Yaga, the heroic Ivan Tsarevich, and the inexhaustibly beautiful Tsarevna, played so vividly

upon the child's imagination as to keep him awake at night for hours together. As soon as he realized the functions of the piano, he set about making childish musical pictures of these personages. For the first ten years of his life he enjoyed a rural environment, and at an early age he displayed that affection for the land and its denizens that characterized his later outlook upon the world.

Naturally it fell to his mother to give him his first lessons in music. Seeing that the only region in which Moussorgsky ever reached technical excellence was in that of piano-playing, it may be supposed that her instruction was not wanting in method. But perceiving, no doubt, that his studies would be of greater value if carried on under the guidance of someone trained in the art of teaching, she lost no time, once the boy's gift was evident, in engaging a governess—a German, whose qualifications were unexceptionable. In her hands little Modeste made quite rapid strides. At the age of seven he could already give a fair account of some light pieces of Liszt, and when only nine he astonished the guests at an evening party by his mastery over a concerto by John Field.

A few years later the two brothers were taken to Petrograd and placed in a school. Modeste was eventually to enter the army, but the parents, rejoicing at his evident gift for music, determined to do everything in their power to develop it. Necessary inquiries having been made, their choice fell upon Herke, a teacher with a considerable following, whom they engaged to direct the youngster's studies. The

master was able at once to endorse the opinion of Modeste's parents, and undertook his training with great enthusiasm. The little fellow soon showed that his teacher's confidence was not misplaced. He made such progress that after a year's tuition he was allowed to take part in a small concert; he acquitted himself so well, and attracted so much attention, that his delighted master bestowed on him a copy of a Beethoven sonata as a mark of his esteem.

In 1852, Moussorgsky entered a private preparatory institution, from whence he passed into the school for Ensigns of the Guard. His first composition was an "Ensigns' Polka," which he dedicated to his comrades. Herke, with whom he was still taking lessons, insisted on publishing the piece. During the last two years of his course at the school, which ended in 1855, he was obliged to devote rather less attention to music; his military studies were taking up a good deal of his time. He went to Herke once a week, and was allowed also to attend when the daughter of the school director took her lessons.

Moussorgsky appears to have been a particularly diligent scholar. His biographers record that at this time, in addition to his military and musical studies, he displayed a decided liking for history and philosophy; he is said to have begun a translation of Lavater while still in the early 'teens, surely a remarkable taste in a youth. Hardly less odd, perhaps, was the desire to acquaint himself with the basic principles of the music of the Greek Church, for which purpose he studied privately with one of the school staff. A little

later in life he had every reason to congratulate himself on having made these researches. Moussorgsky wrote no music which could be called, in the strict sense of the term, sacred, but in the two music-dramas, "Boris Godounof" and "Khovanshchina," as well as in a satirical song, he has proved that the hours passed with the priest Kroupsky were well spent.

Already during his school-days he had made one or two musical friends; among them was Azanchevsky, who eventually became Director of the Petrograd Conservatoire; and on entering the Preobajensky regiment of Guards (in 1856), he found himself among quite a number of young amateurs of music. Sub-lieutenant Orfano had a weakness, for which his name seems to account, for Italian opera; Orlof's taste ran in the direction of the military march; Demidof, afterwards a friend of Dargomijsky and class inspector at the Conservatoire, was a popular song-writer; while Prince Obolensky, the nature of whose proclivities is not defined, was deemed worthy to receive the dedication of a little piano piece written by Moussorgsky at this time.

It is clear that the young composer had no intention of limiting his efforts to the region of salon music, for not long after his entrance into the Preobajensky he began his first attempt at opera. Here, however, desire outran performance, and neither the libretto which he tried to adapt from Hugo's "Han d'Islande," nor its abortive musical setting, resulted in anything more tangible than the respectful admiration of his comrades.

It is likely that, had his musical environment not been enlarged, he might not have been encouraged to widen his outlook upon the art. Hitherto his social circle had consisted of young men who regarded music purely as a diversion, and the possession of a pleasant baritone voice and a marked talent for piano-playing was sufficient to secure a considerable popularity among them.

II.

Towards the early autumn of 1856, however, he fell in with someone whose aims were a little more elevated, someone serious enough to realize the futility of Moussorgsky's musical life at that moment. This was A. P. Borodin, now known to the world as the composer of "Prince Igor," but then a young man of some twenty-two years who divided his time between scientific research and the pursuit of music. Borodin has left us a pen-picture which describes in graphic fashion the young guardsman himself and the musical society he was then wont to affect.

"My first meeting with Moussorgsky took place in September or October, 1856. I had just been made an army surgeon. Moussorgsky was then seventeen years of age. We met in the hospital common-room. We were both rather bored by our duties and were glad of an opportunity for conversation. In a few moments we had discovered our common interest. That evening we had been invited to the quarters of the chief medical officer Popof. The latter had a marriageable daughter. . . . Moussorgsky was at this

time a real dandy . . . with the airs of a great personage. . . . He had a rather affected way of talking, and his conversation was interlarded with French expressions. . . . He would seat himself at the piano and play snatches of 'Trovatore' or 'Traviata,' to the delight of the assembled company of ladies. . . . I only saw Moussorgsky three or four times, and then lost sight of him. . . ."

More important in its effect upon Moussorgsky's musical development was his meeting, a month or so later, with Dargomijsky, to whom he was introduced by one of his comrades, Vanliarsky by name. The composer of "Russalka," which had just been produced, took a great liking for the young officer, and under this influence the latter's taste rapidly underwent a change. He began to feel a need for a more serious type of music and a more discriminating audience. As time went on he became conscious that beneath his superficial respect for the vanities of life and of art lay a desire to come to grips with their realities. There was thus a good deal in common between Dargomijsky and his young disciple.

Just about a year after the chance meeting described by Borodin, Moussorgsky became acquainted with two others, whose names are now invariably associated not only with his own and Borodin's, but with that of Rimsky-Korsakof, who afterwards joined and completed the little côterie subsequently famous as the "Five." These two, Mili Alexeyevich Balakiref and Cesar Antonovich Cui, were frequent visitors at Dargomijsky's. In the previous year Balakiref had come to

Petrograd to complete the musical studies he had until then been prosecuting under the guidance of Oulibishef, the biographer of Mozart. Oulibishef had given his young *protégé* a letter to Glinka, and the composer of " A Life for the Tsar " had been mightily pleased to meet with one who was so obviously suited to conduct a propaganda on behalf of his cherished nationalistic ideal. Balakiref was not long in the capital before he met Cui. Both were young men under twenty, and their common dissatisfaction with the condition of musical taste in Petrograd served as a bond of friendship. Cui had known Dargomijsky for some little time, and was thus well versed in the principles of the Glinkist ideal. Balakiref and Cui resolved that the prevailing taste for all things foreign must be discouraged, and that, in music at any rate, a national style should be founded which should oust the German, French, and Italian traditions that had so long been objects of worship in Russia.

Moussorgsky's association with Dargomijsky and his two disciples was the means of leading him to the study of a work of which, in one sense, " Boris Godounof " is to be considered the prototype. Glinka's " A Life for the Tsar," of which he appears hitherto to have known little or nothing, contains at least two of the elements that are characteristics of Moussorgsky's music-drama. It has a purely Russian subject, and it glorifies the Russian people. Here, then, was a work which could hardly fail to inspire a man who had but lately turned away from the facile successes of the drawing-room.

Besides these, there are other components to be discovered in Moussorgsky's operatic and vocal works which are to be traced, not to the influence of Glinka, but to that of Dargomijsky. Discussion of this influence must, however, be deferred; for the moment we are concerned only with drawing attention to the circumstances responsible for Moussorgsky's remarkable emancipation. The young guardsman had found himself; he had seen, as it were, a reflection of his own latent creative powers and tendencies in the works of Glinka and Dargomijsky; the patriotism of the first and the sincerity of the second drove him to realize that this type of music must for the future monopolize his attention and interest. He would, in his own words, devote himself to " real " music.

III.

As up to this time Moussorgsky's musical activities had been largely of a social kind, he felt that in order to take his place, as he desired, beside his new associates, he must render himself conversant with the form and structure of music; to this end he resolved to take lessons from Balakiref, whose knowledge was sufficiently wide to enable him to take the place of leader in the newly established côterie.*

Balakiref's account of his method of instruction is

* The associated reformers, Balakiref, Cui, Borodin, Moussorgsky, and Rimsky-Korsakof, have been collectively designated in a variety of appellations, some of them disrespectful. They are referred to elsewhere in this volume as " The Circle," the " Five," and " The Invincible Band."

a little astonishing. Master and pupil played through, in four-handed arrangements, the works of the classic masters, and those of such moderns as Schumann, Berlioz, and Liszt. "So well did I explain to him their musical form," says a communication to Stassof, "that he was soon able to compose a symphonic Allegro which was not altogether wanting in merit."

Balakiref was plainly cognizant that these lessons were not to be regarded as comprehensive. He avows that his own knowledge did not permit of anything more than the analysis of forms, that he was unable to undertake instruction in harmony; but he appears to have been satisfied that for Moussorgsky such knowledge was negligible. He was at all events sufficiently pleased with his pupil's early essays in composition to recommend them for performance, with the result that one of two orchestral scherzos (that in B minor) was played in 1860 at a concert of the Russian Musical Society, under the conductorship of Anton Rubinstein. The choral setting of Sophocles' "Œdipus," also written at this time, was performed in the following year—Constantin Lyadof, the father of the famous composer, conducting.

With the development of his creative capacity, Moussorgsky began to conceive an aversion from his military duties, and his transference to a station at some little distance from Petrograd served to increase his desire to be freed from them. Arguing to himself that absence from the capital would involve a cessation of his musical activities, he resolved to send in his papers.

Stassof's reminder that the great Lermontof had contrived to reconcile the two occupations of poet and soldier met with the laconic reply: "Lermontof and I are two different people." He had also to argue with his other friends. Despite all remonstrance, he carried his determination into effect and, forsaking Mars, devoted himself henceforth to St. Cecilia.

The cause of Moussorgsky's subsequent physical degeneration is now known to have been intemperance, but there can be little doubt that his nervous system was far from normal. More than once in the chronicle of his short life one finds a record of nervous breakdown. The first of these occurred shortly after the severance of his connection with the army, and in consequence he was obliged to betake himself from Petrograd for a time. The medicinal waters at Tikhvin, the birthplace of Rimsky-Korsakof, brought about an improvement in his health which enabled him to resume his activities as a composer. During the summer he wrote a "Children's Scherzo" and an "Impromptu Passionné," both for piano; the latter, which is said to have been inspired by a perusal of a then popular "problem" novel, was not published until after his death.

The change in Moussorgsky has been referred to as a physical degeneration; it should be understood that the later intellectual decay did not manifest itself during the period now under review. On the contrary, he has left indisputable evidence of a spiritual awakening which seems to have begun soon after his resignation from the army. In a letter to Cui, written from

his mother's house at Toropets, he records his exasperation at the behaviour of the reactionaries who had set themselves energetically to oppose the emancipation of serfs, which had just then been effected. The composer of the "Ensigns' Polka" was becoming aware that the real greatness of Russia lay in the temper of its people. The triumphs of the smart guardsman were forgotten; he had now an altogether different social ideal.

Borodin, who again met Moussorgsky in the autumn of 1859, was apparently struck rather by the physical than the mental change, although the former tells us that the latter's views on music had undergone a remarkable transformation. "He looked much older, had grown stouter, and had lost his military bearing. As might be supposed, we talked a good deal about music. I was at that time a devotee of Mendelssohn; of Schumann I knew nothing. . . . Ivanovsky (assistant professor at the Medical Academy), seeing that we had a common ground of sympathy, asked us to play a four-handed arrangement of Mendelssohn's A minor symphony. Moussorgsky demurred at first, but consented on condition that the Andante, which he submitted was not symphonic and savoured of the 'Songs without words,' should be omitted. . . . Later Moussorgsky spoke enthusiastically of Schumann's symphonies. . . . He began to play excerpts from the one in E flat. Arrived at the development section, he stopped for a moment, saying: 'Now for the musical mathematics!'"

Further light upon Moussorgsky's changing outlook

on life is shed by his choice of a mode of living on his return from Toropets to Petrograd. He now joined a party of young progressives, whose views on the prevailing topic are revealed in the name given to their côterie, "La Commune."

Some half-dozen of them shared a flat, each having a private room; their evenings were spent in a common-room, in which took place lively discussions on music, art, and sociological matters. This arrangement was of a kind very popular at that time among students, single officers, and State employees. Their "gospel" was Chernishevsky's socialistic volume, "Shto dyelat ?" (What is to be done ?), in which the problems of the newly freed peasantry had been dealt with.

In this circle Moussorgsky was the only member not employed by the State. But after a time he discovered that to live by music alone was impossible, and he began to undertake translation work. This occupation, while solving the one problem, raised another. His health began once more to give way. His brother Filaret tried to induce him to give up the "Commune." Moussorgsky at first refused, but when a little later his constitution gave signs of a break-up, he gave way, left Petrograd, and established himself at Minkino. This sojourn in the country, which lasted until 1868, was altogether beneficial to his health.

IV.

Although Moussorgsky was worried both by a decline in health and by money matters, the period spent with the "Commune" was not entirely

unfruitful. Considering, indeed, the ultimate fate of the composition which represents that period, it may be regarded as singularly important.

One of the literary topics discussed by the little côterie had been a newly issued Russian version of Flaubert's "Salammbô."

Moussorgsky's work as a whole shows far less of a predilection for Orientalism than that of his colleagues of the "Five." Yet this subject appealed to him sufficiently to suggest itself as the plot of an opera, and having contrived to adapt the original for its dramatic purpose, entered upon his first serious operatic undertaking. On his departure from Petrograd he put this on one side. It was never resumed, but various fragments of the three completed scenes were afterwards drawn upon, and are now to be heard in the mature works with which the world is familiar. Thus "Salammbô," although itself an abortive work, may be considered as foreshadowing the composer's maturity. The songs composed contemporaneously, "Night" and "Kallistrate," are also to be classed with his later vocal works in point of quality and style.

In the meantime Moussorgsky had fallen more and more under the influence of Dargomijsky. The latter's epoch-making opera "The Stone Guest" was attracting the attention of the Circle as a whole, and performances of the completed portions were a prominent feature of the gatherings which now took place at Dargomijsky's house. Moussorgsky's share in the proceedings was the doubling of the parts of Leporello

and Don Carlos, but his attention to the work did not end with this; he had arrived at a complete agreement with its composer as to the method of operatic construction employed therein.

"When Moussorgsky left St. Petersburg for the country in 1866," says M. Olenin d'Alheim, "his friends in parting with him expressed the hope that he would return with an opera. No sooner had he settled down to country life than he hastened to comply."*

Of the Circle two other members had begun to write operas, of which the method of construction was to be in conformity with that of "The Stone Guest." Balakiref had taken the subject of "The Golden Bird," in a version resembling Grimm's story, whilst Borodin was occupied with a setting of Mey's "The Tsar's Bride," a dramatized record of an episode in the life of Ivan the Terrible. Both these attempts were abandoned. Balakiref discovered that he had no gift for Opera, and Borodin soon realized that his vocation lay in following Glinka rather than Dargomijsky. Lyricism and not dramatic realism was the medium natural to him. As to Cui, he was not precisely disenchanted with the Dargomijskian method; it may be said that he persevered with the decreed principles, but in putting them into practice he was but partially successful.

Moussorgsky's choice of a libretto fell on Gogol's well-known play "The Matchmaker." The task of providing this with a musical setting would hardly have attracted anyone who had not been in

* "Moussorgski." Paris, 1896.

complete sympathy with the propaganda on foot in the Circle. Viewed even as a demonstration of the principle that "the word must be reflected in the sound," which was Dargomijsky's watchword, Gogol's "utterly incredible comedy" might well have been considered as presenting certain insuperable difficulties. "The Matchmaker" is throughout in colloquial prose; no one who had been brought up to respect the settled traditions of Opera could for one moment have dreamed of such a libretto. With Moussorgsky it was different. He knew "The Stone Guest"; it never occurred to him to regard it as a "recitative in three acts" (it was thus described on its first performance by a cynical critic); he saw in it an attempt to give dignity to the name of Opera, and as this had become his own particular desire he resolved to make a similar attempt.

When Moussorgsky returned for a short time to Petrograd, he did not bring an opera with him. But, far from showing any disappointment, his friends displayed the greatest interest in the plan of the projected work. On leaving the capital once again he addressed himself immediately to the composition of the music for "The Matchmaker." Writing on July 3rd, 1868, to Cui, from the village of Chilof, he reports progress: ". . . No sooner had I got away from St. Petersburg than I finished the first scene. . . . The first act is divided into three scenes. . . . I am trying to work out the various inflections of intonation which will be heard from the performers in the course of the dialogue, and this, moreover, is to be observed

in the minutest particular. In this, in my opinion, is to be found the secret of the greatness of Gogol's humour. . . ." To this letter Moussorgsky adds a postscript, dated July 10th: "I have finished the first act. . . . There will be four instead of three scenes: it had to be." The composer's enthusiasm for the subject is shown in a further communication to his friend, written a month or so later: "What a subtle imagination Gogol has! He has studied the peasant class and has discovered some most captivating types among them. . . . His old women are priceless."

In addition to his actual creative work Moussorgsky had for some time been striving to improve his very deficient technique. "In Balakiref's community," writes Rimsky-Korsakof in his Memoirs, "it was the custom to regard such studies as those of harmony and counterpoint as negligible. . . ." If Moussorgsky at that time (1866-67) was capable of "making a virtue of his ignorance," it is certain that he very soon realized the futility of so doing, even if he did not reveal his altered attitude to his friends.

It is unfortunately impossible to determine his progress. "The Destruction of Sennacherib" (after Byron's poem), a work for chorus and orchestra, is supposed to have been an "exercise" prompted by the consciousness of an improvement in the art of instrumentation, but this, like the "Night on the Bare Mountain," composed in 1867, has been published in the later version, in which the instrumentation is that of Rimsky-Korsakof; the version of the latter now used is so different from the symphonic

tableau of 1867 that it throws no more light upon the composer's technical capabilities at the date at which it was written than does the choral work.

Some interesting specimens of vocal writing are also to be associated with this period. Among them are the popular "Gopak" (to a text by the Ukrainian Shevchenko); "The Seminarist," a song in the satirical vein, which portrays a theological student "whose efforts to grapple with some Latin substantives are sadly disturbed by the intruding mental vision of his teacher's fair daughter";* "The Orphan," a wonderful example of the musical reflection of the spoken accent; and "Yeremoushka's Cradle Song."

Such specimens as "The Seminarist" and "The Orphan" are obviously by-products of "The Matchmaker" period. In the one we are able to recognize the spiritual affinity between Moussorgsky and Gogol; in the other we may observe the realization of the Dargomijskian ideal in a small form.

The period above referred to was destined to reach an abrupt termination. "The Matchmaker" was never finished. On the resumption of the meetings of the Circle in the autumn of 1868, the first act was given a drawing-room performance at Dargomijsky's house, the parts being played by the composer, Dargomijsky, Velyaminof—an amateur vocalist—and the two sisters Pourgold—Alexandra in the title-rôle, and Nadejda, who afterwards married Rimsky-Korsakof, at the piano. The last-named composer records in

* M. Montagu-Nathan, "A History of Russian Music." (W. Reeves.)

his Memoirs that the fragment made a profound impression, especially upon Stassof, to whom the work was afterwards dedicated. The composer of "The Stone Guest," we are told, considered that Moussorgsky had a little over-reached himself, in what respect does not transpire; one imagines that exception was taken to the meticulousness with which in "The Matchmaker" Moussorgsky sought a co-ordination of text and music.

The cause of Moussorgsky's sudden resolve to abandon his "*opera dialogué*" was that the subject of "Boris Godounof" had been suggested to him. In that section of the musical world in which this great national music-drama is well known, there must surely be something approaching unanimity of opinion that of the two the latter work could less be spared. "Boris" is of course a much more genial score. And without approaching at all closely the conventional opera, it is at all events more in conformity with that type than the quite revolutionary "Matchmaker." But if, as one hopes may be, the reform of Opera is ever carried to the same lengths as have already been reached in the domain of the drama pure and simple, Moussorgsky's fragment must then be estimated at a higher value. It is a work that makes no concessions whatever. It is a musical comedy in which the effect of the humour of the original is heightened by its musical setting. "The Matchmaker" demonstrates that music may be married to drama without danger of its becoming a mere handmaiden of the other art. Moussorgsky has been himself a matchmaker; the

marriage he brought about must surely have received the sanction of St. Cecilia; it is a great misfortune that the union should have been shortlived.

V.

On Moussorgsky's return to urban life he sought the hospitable shelter offered by some friends of his mother, Opochinin by name. Here he continued to live for two years, during half of which period he held a post in the Department of Woods and Forests. The composer has left tributes to the kindness shown him by these friends in the shape of various dedications. The unfinished song entitled "Death—an Epitaph" is inscribed "To N.P.O. . . chi. . . n," and is said to have been inspired by his grief at the lady's death. It was under the Opochinins' roof that much of "Boris Godounof" was written. Its subject was suggested to the composer by Vladimir Vassilievich Nikolsky, a professor at the University of Petrograd, whom Moussorgsky had met at the house of Mme Shestakof, Glinka's sister. For the libretto he went to the famous work of Pushkin, interpolating certain interesting historical episodes from Karamzin's chronicles of the period. This initial version was subsequently modified to no small extent, not without some reluctance, however, on Moussorgsky's part.

Aware that a successful treatment of the subject would entitle him to wear the mantle of no less a man than Glinka, he threw himself into his work with

immense enthusiasm, and "Boris" progressed with wonderful rapidity. Begun on September 6th, 1868, it was completed within a year. Its first act was finished in a little over two months, and won the warm approval of Dargomijsky, who, despite his failing health, still took part in the meetings of the Circle. There was, however, a complete unanimity of opinion as to certain defects in the general plan of "Boris," one of them being an absence of feminine interest. To this the composer demurred.

But when in the autumn of 1870 he submitted the work to the operatic authorities, he was forced to see that even if the criticism was uncalled for, the hiatus complained of would militate against his chances of seeing the opera accepted.

The Imperial Operatic Committee consisted of Napravnik, Manjean, and Betz, the respective conductors of Russian, French, and German Opera, and Ferrero, a double-bass player who was apparently watching over the interests of Italian music. The novelty of the composer's music was not viewed with the sympathy it commanded in his own immediate circle, and the absence of a prominent female character was pronounced by the Committee to be a vital defect. There were some other quite frivolous objections, among them the point raised by Ferrero, who took exception to certain "impossible" passages for his own instrument. Moussorgsky was of course deeply offended, but he seems to have realized that his scenario left much to be desired. At any rate he set about making some radical alterations. He inserted the

Polish Act, which brought in a love interest; and the scene in the Kromy forest, hitherto the penultimate, was now placed at the end of the opera. The episodes of the striking clock and the parakeet, which occur in the second act (the Tsar's apartments), were also added.

The whole of the year 1871 was devoted to the reconstruction of "Boris." Moussorgsky was guided in this labour by several of his friends, Stassof the critic, Hartmann the architect, whose name he has immortalized in "The Picture-Show," Nikolsky, and Rimsky-Korsakof, with whom he had now begun to share rooms.

One imagines the latter to be right in supposing this to be the single instance of two composers thus joining forces. He gives us an assurance that each of the pair was able to carry on his work (Moussorgsky was occupied with the revision of "Boris," and Rimsky-Korsakof was composing his first opera, "The Maid of Pskof") without any sort of clash. The latter spent two mornings a week at the Conservatoire (he was already a professor in that institution); the former left the house at about noon to attend to his official duties at the Ministry of Woods and Forests, and often dined at the Opochinins'. "Nothing," records Rimsky-Korsakof, "could have turned out better. . . . In that autumn and the following winter there was a constant exchange of ideas and plans."

This arrangement became really opportune when Gedeonof approached the Circle with his historic proposal. The then Director of the Imperial Opera

brought forward his "Mlada" project, soliciting the co-operation of Borodin, Cui, Moussorgsky, and Rimsky-Korsakof. The scheme of "Mlada" was to be a combination of ballet, opera, and fairy-tale, on a subject taken from the chronicles of the Polabian Slavs. The ballet dances were entrusted to Minkus, and the rest of the music to the four composers named. The second and third sections of "Mlada" fell to Moussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakof; and as the pagan deity Chernobog figured prominently in the libretto, the former proposed to make use of the unpublished "Night on the Bare Mountain," in the programme of which the Black god is a protagonist.

For reasons not unconnected with finance, Gedeonof was obliged to renounce his ambitious project, and the four composers were left with their musical material on their hands. Long afterwards, when editing Borodin's compositions, Rimsky-Korsakof, at the suggestion of Lyadof, went to this subject for the literary foundation of his opera-ballet "Mlada."

VI.

Moussorgsky returned at once to his work on "Boris." While yet thus occupied Stassof, whose judgment had so often been sought in the choice of a libretto (it is supposed that he had been consulted in the matter of "Mlada"), recommended to Moussorgsky the subject of "Khovanshchina." In Stassof's opinion "the antagonism between the old Russia and the new, and the triumph of the latter, would provide excellent material. . . . Moussorgsky," continues the

critic, " was of the same mind. . . . He set to work with ardour. To study the history of the Raskolniks (Old Believers) and the chronicles of seventeenth-century Russia involved immense labour. The many long letters he wrote me at this time were full of information as to his researches and his views in regard to the music, characters, and scenes of the opera. The best sections were written between 1872 and 1875."

It so happened that, during the earliest days of his occupation with this subject, it was proposed to stage a fragment of " Boris Godounof " at the Maryinsky Theatre on the occasion of a " benefit " given to the *régisseur* Kondratief. The portions chosen were the Inn scene—the famous Petrof undertaking the rôle of Varlaam—and the scene at the fountain, from the Polish Act. The performance, which took place in February, 1873, was so successful that it was decided to stage the whole opera forthwith. From Rimsky-Korsakof one learns that, at a supper held after this preliminary performance, the composer and his opera were toasted in champagne.

The circumstance of this somewhat belated acceptance of " Boris Godounof " called forth the caustic communication (in a birthday letter) addressed to Stassof on January 2nd, 1873: " . . . When we are crucified by the musical Pharisees, then shall we have begun to make progress. . . . It is highly gratifying to think that whilst they are reproaching us for ' Boris ' we are absorbed in ' Khovanshchina.' Our gaze is fixed upon the future, and we are not to be deterred by criticism. They will accuse us of having violated

all the divine and human canons. We shall just say 'Yes,' adding to ourselves that there will be ere long many such violations. 'You will soon be forgotten,' they will croak, 'for ever and aye,' and our answer will be: '*Non, non, et non, Madame.*'" In a postscript he explains to Stassof that the final French denial is a quotation from a certain Princess Volkonsky.

The first complete representation of "Boris Godounof" took place on January 24th, 1874, at the Maryinsky Theatre. With the result of this performance Moussorgsky and his friends had every reason to be satisfied. "We were all triumphant," says Rimsky-Korsakof. The reception of the work by the public was in no respect lacking in warmth. Bands of enthusiasts left the theatre singing passages from the familiar folk-tunes it contains. "Four wreaths, appropriately inscribed, were brought to the theatre on one of the evenings, but through the machinations of an infuriated opposition, their presentation, intended to take place during the performance, was obstructed, and they had to be sent to Moussorgsky's private dwelling."*

The "infuriated opposition" appears to have been organized by the reactionary critics. These accused the composer of "technical ignorance, vulgarity, want of taste. . . ." It would appear that the critical faction wielded a power so great as to defeat popular enthusiasm. After running for twenty performances, "Boris Godounof" disappeared from the placards of the Imperial Opera, and was kept quite in the background for many years.

* M. Montagu-Nathan, *op. cit.*

VII.

The period in which the preparation of "Boris Godounof" bulks so largely is also notable for some other important compositions.

The first among these is the satirical song known as "The Classicist." The arrogance of "The Invincible Band" as a whole, and particularly that displayed by Cui in his criticisms, was a constant source of vexation to the orthodox party. Balakiref, as conductor of the Russian Musical Society's concerts, came in for a good share of the opprobrium heaped upon the Circle; and the constitution of a programme, given in 1869, in which the compositions of the "New Russian School" figured somewhat prominently, was warmly criticized by such writers as Serof, Theophilus Tolstoi, and Famintsin, on the score of its neglect of the classics. The chief object of the attack was Borodin's E flat major symphony, the leading assailant being Famintsin. A short time after this, Rimsky-Korsakof's symphonic tableau "Sadko" was performed. Its theme had been suggested by Moussorgsky, who at one time had intended making use of it himself, and his ire was thoroughly aroused when Famintsin greeted the work with a particularly spiteful article. It needed no more than a mere suggestion from Stassof to provoke the composition of "The Classicist," a satire on the reactionary critic with a special allusion to the disapproval of certain manifestations of modernism in "Sadko," from which work "The Classicist" contains a quotation.

A few months later Moussorgsky applied himself to a general castigation of the opposing party by means of the thongs of satire. "In 'The Peepshow' he did not confine himself as before to the lampooning of one critic, but committed himself to a characteristic reproduction of the particular musical foible of each. . . . It invites inspection of a series of puppets in a showman's booth."* Zaremba, director of the Conservatoire, the pietist for whom the minor mode signified original sin, the major, redemption; Theophilus Tolstoi, an unqualified critic whose ignorance and whose admiration of Patti have been suitably dealt with by Cui in a "fable" which is really a masterpiece of satire; Famintsin, whose appearance is accompanied by a reference to some law proceedings instituted against Stassof; and lastly Serof the Wagnerian, referred to by means of a quotation from his "Rogneda"—these were the subjects of Moussorgsky's musical caricature. When a further attack was suggested—Stassof proposed a song to be called "The Crab"—Moussorgsky must surely have considered that this would be tantamount to thrashing a dead horse; at any rate he did not act upon the hint.

Another work belonging to this period, one which possesses a far greater significance as a work of art, is the set of seven songs called "The Nursery." The first of these, "Nurse, Tell Me a Tale," is dedicated to Dargomijsky, whose encouragement is responsible for the subsequent completion of the series. In "The Nursery" is to be found the most remarkable of the

* M. Montagu-Nathan, *op. cit.*

composer's manifestations of genius. In two respects these little sketches of child-life are absolutely unconventional. In the first place, as the composer not only loved children, but possessed the rare faculty of understanding them, he does not portray them from the view-point of those " grown-ups " who are so confident of the advantages of experience that they forget to give credit for intuitive insight. Moussorgsky looked upon children not as miniature and inexperienced men and women, but as beings peopling a world of their own. Secondly, he repudiated the tradition that when writing for the voice a lyrical method must invariably be employed. The method of " The Nursery " is not the mere expression in music of emotions aroused by the text. The music fulfils the function of description concurrently with the text; it speaks with the words; it describes, moreover, the very gestures and actions of the *dramatis personæ*.

The circumstances under which the " Picture-Show " was composed should here be related, since it was in 1874 that Moussorgsky undertook this novel kind of musical memorial. It was proposed by Stassof, in the spring of that year, to hold an exhibition of drawings and water-colours by the architect Victor Hartmann—one of the designers of the Nijni Novgorod monument in commemoration of the thousandth anniversary of the foundation of the Russian State—who had recently died. Moussorgsky had been on very friendly terms with the artist, and wished to pay a tribute of his own devising. He determined, therefore, to attempt the reproduction of some of the

pictures in terms of descriptive music. Aiming at something more than a mere reproduction, he gives, in the "Promenade" which connects the little pieces, a clue to his own emotions when contemplating Hartmann's work.

VIII.

We have already recorded the enthusiasm with which Moussorgsky began his preparation of the material for the libretto of "Khovanshchina," the subject recommended to him by Stassof in 1872. His researches kept him busy until late in the autumn of the following year, when he began work on the music. In course of its construction the libretto underwent several changes of plan, some of them dictated by the Censor. The music progressed but slowly, for the composer's powers had already begun to suffer from the excesses in which for some time he had been indulging. He was unable to apply himself for any length of time to one particular task, and had contracted a habit of dividing his attention among a number of projects simultaneously.

Thus with "Khovanshchina" little more than begun, he was deep in plans for a comic opera on the subject of Gogol's "Sorochinsk Fair." Like the former, "Sorochinsk Fair" was never finished; under stress of poverty, however, the composer was prevailed upon by a publisher to issue one or two numbers arranged for piano solo. These pieces gave no indication whatever as to their dramatic import.

Moussorgsky's dissipated habits were by this time beginning to estrange him from his boon companions. A certain eccentricity of manner had also begun to show itself. What annoyed his friends most was an affectation of superiority, which seems to have been prompted partly by the success of "Boris," by the unreserved praise of Stassof, and by the admiration of people unworthy to express an opinion on Moussorgsky's work. In spite of these changes, however, his connection with the Circle was not entirely severed, and the composer of "Khovanshchina" occasionally brought to their evenings the fruit of his intermittent labours upon that score.

In 1879, Rimsky-Korsakof introduced into the programme of a concert at the Free School of Music the chorus of Streltsy, Martha's song, and the Persian Dances. At another he gave a scene from "Boris." The conductor's account of Moussorgsky's behaviour at the rehearsal of this concert shows pretty plainly the degree to which his mental decay had already proceeded.

The excerpt from "Khovanshchina," given at the first-mentioned Free School Concert, was performed by the then well-known singer Mlle Leonof, who had recently opened a small academy of music in Petrograd. This lady's education had been somewhat scanty, but she possessed sufficient acumen to perceive that while her name would undoubtedly attract pupils, her capacity for instruction was too slender to enable her to retain them. Moussorgsky's financial position was just then an extremely unfor-

tunate one, and in order to improve matters he engaged himself to Mlle Leonof as supervisor of studies in her school.

In the summer of 1880 he went with her on a concert tour of Southern Russia, as accompanist and soloist. As, since his youth, he had neglected the pianist's repertoire, the choice of programme was not by any means a simple matter. To cope with the situation he played selections from operas with which he happened to be familiar, among them the introduction to Glinka's "Russlan and Ludmilla," and the bell music from the Coronation scene of "Boris."

In a letter dated January 16th, 1880, he communicates to the faithful Stassof the glad tidings that at Nikolayef and Kherson the "Nursery" songs have been performed with the most gratifying results before an audience of children. During this tour, inspired by the Crimean scenery, Moussorgsky composed three descriptive piano pieces; one of them, described by Rimsky-Korsakof as a somewhat lengthy and quite ridiculous Storm-fantasia—a reminiscence of the Black Sea—was not committed to paper.

It has been related that Moussorgsky's work on "Khovanshchina" was not continuous, and that other absorbing tasks occupied his mind during its composition. Following Rimsky-Korsakof's marriage, Moussorgsky took up his abode in rooms which he shared with the poet Count Golenishchef-Kutuzof. Two groups of poems by the latter were set to music by Moussorgsky in 1874 and 1875.

The first, "Without Sunlight," contains six ex-

quisite numbers. In these the composer has ceased to be objective, and has for once become introspective. It is perhaps in these songs that Moussorgsky approaches most closely to the ideal of melo-declamation set up by his precursor Dargomijsky. The vocal line is to some extent melodic in character, but is rarely cast in continuous melody. On the other hand they preserve a musical quality which is absent from the quasi-conversational manner of "The Nursery."

The second cycle, "Songs and Dances of Death," was composed at different periods, the first three in 1875 and the last number two years later. Their textual idea originated with Stassof, who suggested to Count Golenishchef-Kutuzof the creation of poems dealing with Holbein's well-known work.* The "Trepak," "Cradle Song," and "Serenade," present the dread figure in rather more convincing a manner than the fourth, "The Commander-in-Chief"—a picture of Death surveying a battlefield. The somewhat inferior conception of the music of the last has been attributed, no doubt correctly, to the state of the composer's health at the time at which it was written.

Moussorgsky's last years were spent in poverty and physical decay. Already in 1876 his financial resources were reduced to the bare pittance he received from the State department in which he was employed. Writing to Stassof at this time, he spoke of supplementing this beggarly income by taking engagements as a pianist. This led to the arrangement with Mlle Leonof, and the Crimean tour.

* "Death's Doings," by Richard Dagley, London, 1827, is a work of a similar kind.

In 1878 he lost a dear friend through the death of Petrof, for whom he had intended to write an important part in "Sorochinsk Fair." This event so affected him that he was unable to do work of any description for a considerable time. Following the tour, he began to model an orchestral suite with a Crimean programme, but got no further than the preliminary sketch.

The summer of 1880 was spent in the country, but his health showed no signs of improvement. In the following February he journeyed to Petrograd to attend a Free School concert, at which Rimsky-Korsakof conducted "The Destruction of Sennacherib." His work was acclaimed, and he made his last public appearance in acknowledging the tributes of this audience. A month later he became seriously ill as the result of an attack of delirium tremens. His friends Balakiref, Borodin, Stassof, and Rimsky-Korsakof were summoned, and they visited him in turn at the Military Hospital up to the moment of death. This occurred on his birthday, March 16th, 1881.

Arrangements had already been made with a view to preserving as many of his works as could be found for publication. Balakiref's friend, T. I. Filippof, was appointed executor, and he speedily found a publisher willing to undertake their issue. The responsibility of revising them was assumed by Rimsky-Korsakof, who devoted many years to this labour.

Moussorgsky was buried in the Alexander Nevsky Monastery, and a monument—the work of Bogomolof and Gunsburg—was erected to his memory.

PART II

MOUSSORGSKY AS OPERATIC COMPOSER

I.

THERE is no ground for supposing that Moussorgsky's lively humanitarian instincts had been completely quiescent before they were aroused by the spread of socialistic propaganda, consequent on the great reformative act of Alexander (the emancipation of serfs) and the appearance of Chernishevsky's thought-provoking "What is to be done?"

In his biography, Stassof is able to dispel such an illusion. Therein he quotes a letter, written him by Moussorgsky's brother Filaret, to the effect that the composer, long before reaching manhood, had manifested feelings of complete sympathy with the humble serf, considering the Russian peasant as the "real man" (*nastoyarshchy chelovek*).

When the moment came for Russian society as a whole so to regard the peasantry, Moussorgsky did not hold himself aloof, but joined in the movement of "simplification," so enthusiastically set on foot by young Russia. Thus in 1863 we find him associated with the "Commune," of which he remained for three years a member.

Moussorgsky plainly belonged, then, to the "pro-

gressives " of his own generation, in so far as concerns ethics. His music proclaims that as a creative artist he was far in advance of that generation.

II.

The choice of literary material as subject-matter for music-drama was for such a man no vexed problem. He wished to glorify the Russian people.

Glinka had already made a beginning in this respect with his national opera " A Life for the Tsar," in which his hero was not the monarch, but the loyal peasant who died for him. Before Wagner had made his suggestion that the operatic art should have no dealings with history, because history concerned itself mainly with the movements of monarchs and rulers, Glinka had already given an effective reply. What Moussorgsky did was not merely to adopt the Glinkist tradition, but to improve on it.

Already in his early operatic essay, based on Flaubert's " Salammbô," he had given the chorus precedence of the *prima donna*.

In " Boris Godounof " and in " Khovanshchina " he boldly confers upon the chorus a protagonistic responsibility. At one stroke he dismisses the Wagnerian objection to historical material, and repudiates the proposed alternative, the legendary subject. He has no use for symbolism, and declines to resort to the allegorical puppet as a mouthpiece. He was a realist who knew that the People had something to say, and he let them speak for themselves.

While as a man he had strong sympathies with the nationalistic ideal of Glinka, he had as a composer very little, if anything, in common with the "father of Russian Opera;" it is from Dargomijsky that Moussorgsky the artist has derived. The "New Russian School," inaugurated towards the end of the fifties by Balakiref and Cui, had all but pledged itself to an observance of the principles of operatic and vocal art drawn up under Dargomijsky's guidance, and afterwards had every reason to be thankful that the pledge had never been signed and sealed. Among them Moussorgsky alone was a life-long apostle of the composer of "The Stone Guest." Borodin, Cui, and Rimsky-Korsakof felt that they could do no less than make experimental essays in Dargomijskian opera, and if they were not all three obliged, as was Borodin, to confess that the rigid abstention from all the old operatic practices was foreign to their nature, they did not at any rate adhere very faithfully to the Dargomijskian decree.

With Moussorgsky it was quite otherwise. His attitude towards music as an art was one of an almost transcendent seriousness. Art was to be the means of throwing a high light upon the dignity of Life; Art itself must therefore be dignified. "Life in all its aspects, . . . the truth whether palatable or no," is the burden of his refrain in a passionate letter to Stassof, written in August, 1875.

With such a man concessions to a prevailing taste were not to be thought of. Inspired by the precept of Dargomijsky, with whom he had been on intimate

terms, he set himself to build up a musico-dramatic structure that could never become old-fashioned. Opera was no longer to be an entertainment devised for the public of one particular generation; it was to be an art, to have a purpose.

"SALAMMBÔ"

III.

Moussorgsky's first serious attempt at Opera was the setting of Flaubert's "Salammbô," already referred to. This was begun in 1863. As has been said, the work appears to have been designed to give to the collective human interest that prominence usually accorded the individual. But this was not the only feature of the work testifying to Moussorgsky's respect for the operatic form. From Stassof we learn that the composer paid very close attention to the question of scenic detail, and that he made a diligent study of Flaubert's novel with a view to reproducing in his libretto everything likely to contribute to a faithful dramatic rendering of the original. The design and colour of costumes, lighting effects, and even the gestures and demeanour of the characters were carefully studied by the composer.

"Salammbô" was abandoned when still quite incomplete. Its music has not, however, been lost to the world. Most of the fragments composed were afterwards embodied with necessary modifications in later works; the rest has been revised and edited by V. G. Karatigin. "For the most part," says Stassof,

"this material has gained by its translation," and only once, according to this critic, has the adaptation been disadvantageous. The theme of the arioso in the third act of "Boris Godounof" is less appropriate in its ultimate environment than in the original conception. The libretto of "Salammbô" was written by Moussorgsky, but he interpolated some verses borrowed from the unfortunate poet Polejaef, and from Heine.

"THE MATCHMAKER"

IV.

By the time that Moussorgsky entered upon his second dramatic essay he had fallen completely under the influence of Dargomijsky, hence his resolve to take a bold step towards a legitimate union of text and music.

"The Matchmaker" is directly inspired by Dargomijsky's "The Stone Guest." The composer of the last-named work had achieved what had never hitherto been attempted. He had taken the text of Pushkin's dramatic version of "Don Juan," and had set it from beginning to end without making a single alteration, ignoring, at the same time, every operatic convention. There are no separate vocal numbers beyond Laura's Song, an interpolation sanctioned, or rather invited, by the poet's stage-direction: "She sings." There is no chorus, for the equally good reason that Pushkin's work contains no "crowd." With the exception of this one lapse into pure melody, the score of "The Stone Guest" is written in the recitative, which

Dargomijsky considered to be the only legitimate musical accompaniment of a dramatic text.

In his setting of Gogol's "The Matchmaker," Moussorgsky takes a still more daring step, for this comedy of middle-class Russian society is written in colloquial prose. Far from being daunted, the composer has actually reflected the intonation, demeanour, and the gestures of each character in his music with a thoroughness that, while complete, has no appearance of meticulousness.

The scheme of Gogol's work has been outlined by a writer who was both a brilliant musical critic, and an authority on Russian matters when authorities were few. In "The Russians at Home," the late Mr. Sutherland Edwards gave the following synopsis of "The Matchmaker": "In Gogol's 'Matchmaker' we have a fine study of the bachelor as character. . . . The main idea of the plot—and a highly philosophical one it is—is this: that a bachelor of a certain age must necessarily dread to alter his mode of life to suit that of another person. The chief character of the comedy, who is considered a good match, after considering the qualifications of a number of marriageable young ladies who are all anxious to secure him, selects one; but no sooner has he given his word than he repents. He is afraid of the total change that must take place in his habits after he is married. It is not a love match, for he is a middle-aged man and something more. He reflects, but the bride is coming downstairs in her wedding costume and there is no time for consideration. The handle of the door moves,

and it appears impossible to escape; but the window is open. He leaps into the street and is saved. You hear him calling out to a droshky driver, 'Isvostchik! Isvostchik!' He has disappeared for ever, and the curtain falls."

This is a somewhat over-brief summary of the action, since it makes no reference to the exceedingly funny scene in which the bachelor finds himself in competition with three other characters who, as typical suitors of the class and period under caricature, are the victims of Gogol's satire. But as Moussorgsky's work goes no further than the first scene, the rest may well on the present occasion be neglected. In this one scene there appear but four of the eleven characters: Podkolyossin, the bachelor; Kochkaryof, his friend; Stepan, his servant; and Thyokla, the marriage-broker.

V.

The score of "The Matchmaker" reveals that Moussorgsky was fully qualified to accomplish with success the extraordinary task he had set himself. "What is not the notation of the spoken word," says Mr. Calvocoressi in his monograph, "is the notation of pantomime."* There are, besides, examples of descriptive music in other directions than these; such, for instance, as the quick sweep which describes the silk dress of the chosen lady as "rustling as though a Princess were passing"; and when the friend Kochkaryof, in reciting to the reluctant Podkolyossin the advantages of married life, predicts a family of "not

* "Moussorgsky," Félix Alcan, Paris, 1911.

merely two or three, but six at least," there is a group of two semiquavers, followed by another of three, and, immediately after, a group of six for the definite number, and a scale of $\frac{6}{4}$ chords for the problematic brood. It should be borne in mind that there is nothing in the least gauche about such apparently ingenuous specimens of descriptive music. They may not be quite in tune with our notion of humour to-day, but until some living master can be persuaded to try his hand at the continuously descriptive, we may congratulate ourselves on the preservation of Moussorgsky's example.

Not less remarkable are the places in which changes of emotion and mood are noted. After the breaking of a mirror, when Kochkaryof, the cause of the mishap, consoles Podkolyossin with the promise of a new one, the accompanying music is so perfectly appropriate to the emotional situation that the bar prior to the spoken sentence veritably anticipates for the listener its sense. Again, when at the moment already described, in which occurs the friend's detailed picture of what married life may bring, Moussorgsky resolves a high-pitched dissonance by dropping suddenly into a low, common chord, minus its third, he shows us Podkolyossin's general state of collapse and his frozen stare as plainly as if we were watching the action instead of merely listening to the music.

The score, in fact, reveals how determined Moussorgsky was to observe the letter as well as the spirit of the Dargomijskian method, a method he made his very own.

What the composer thought of this work may be

gathered from the letter he wrote to his friend Stassof, in 1873, after the completion of "Boris." "How can I best thank you?" he asks. "I have found an answer at once. By making a gift of my very self. . . . Pray accept my recent work on Gogol's 'Matchmaker'; examine these attempts at musical discourse, compare them with 'Boris.' . . . You will see that what I now give you is without question myself. . . . You know how dear to me is my 'Matchmaker.' And to tell the truth it was suggested to me (in fun) by Dargomijsky, and (in earnest) by Cui." In the printed score is the formal dedication, which included the gift of all rights in the work to Stassof. This was written, says Moussorgsky, "with a quill pen in Stassof's flat . . . in the presence of a considerable gathering."*

In Stassof's own opinion there was a future for this type of opera. It is many years since that view was expressed. It almost seems now as though there were no future for any other kind.

"SOROCHINSK FAIR"

VI.

It is impossible to treat Moussorgsky's other unfinished opera, "Sorochinsk Fair," as a serious dramatic work, since he himself did not. There is not surviving a sufficiency of connected material for it ever to assume companionship with Rimsky-Korsakof's "A Night in May," in company with which

* A Russian musical essayist, wrongly supposing this to have referred to the whole operatic fragment, has cited these words as evidence of the composer's power of detachment.

story the original appears in Gogol's collection of "Tales of a Farm Near Dikanka." The preserved fragments, one of them being the justly popular "Gopak," have been edited by Lyadof and Karatigin. In the performance of these given at the Moscow Free Art Theatre in the winter of 1913, they were strung together by a spoken dialogue. The vocal music, which is only in part declamatory, can hardly be considered as representing the composer's musico-dramatic manner, but it includes some very charming melody, some of it being quite in the folk-style. A certain part of the original music has had a curious history. Written in the first instance for "Salammbō," it served temporarily as a section of the work now familiar as "A Night on the Bare Mountain," was also used in the composer's contribution to the joint "Mlada" (Gedeonof's project), and was again made use of as an Intermezzo in this unfinished opera.

Musically considered, "Sorochinsk Fair," while far from fully representing its composer, bears undoubted evidences of his advanced thought. Certain rhythmic and harmonic touches, plainly intended to reflect a nice shade of meaning in the text, recall Dargomijsky's maxim, "The sound must represent the word," and are an assurance that Moussorgsky always had this in mind.

"BORIS GODOUNOF"

VII.

By means of his music-drama "Boris Godounof," Moussorgsky first became known to the world as a creative artist who, though hitherto neglected, would

have to be reckoned among the great innovators. For the student of Russian music the work possesses several independent points of interest. In the first place, it is clearly the offspring of Glinka's initial dramatic venture, "A Life for the Tsar." It is at the same time far in advance of its forerunner in its dramatic as well as in its musical conception. It referred, as did Glinka's opera, to one of the most remarkable epochs in the history of Russia. But while Glinka puts before his spectators a plot with a heroic action as its salient, Moussorgsky occupies himself with the revelation of the consequences of an dastardly act. Yet the latter, despite his preoccupation with mental movement and his neglect of physical, does not adopt the procedure of the psychologist-musician. We do not find him indulging in a lengthy exegesis of his own soul-states in presence of the stage tragedy he depicts. He tells a simple though rather horrible tale. His narrative does not bear the impress of the narrator's temperament. "Boris Godounof" is neither the cold compilation of the detached historian, nor the revelation of the mental agony of a greatly interested and concerned onlooker. A spectator of Moussorgsky's version of the tragedy is not first concerned with what he himself is thinking about the dramatic occurrences, nor does he speculate upon the attitude of the composer towards all this murder, strife, and intrigue. His mind is chiefly occupied in observing their effect upon the people participating in the drama. He finds himself glancing at the crowd, and wondering what will be their demeanour in the

face of the next development. And Moussorgsky's crowd never fails to respond.

Operatic nationalism had begun with a Russian text; Glinka had endowed it with a native musical manner. Moussorgsky made it an absolute expression of nationalism.

VIII.

The chapter of Russian history chosen by Moussorgsky as the material of his drama is one which is to be considered as a turning-point in the history of the Russian Empire. It refers to the interim between two great dynasties.

Looking into the future, Ivan the Terrible had perceived that his weak-minded son Feodor, whom he regarded as "more like a sacristan than the son of a Tsar," was quite unfit to control the destinies of a nation. Not long after his father's death Feodor himself became conscious of his incapacity. Accordingly he appointed Boris Godounof, whose marriage into the royal family had been a step prompted by ambition, as Regent. Godounof was not slow to discern the potentialities of his new position. He saw that Feodor's younger brother Dmitri might one day stand between himself and the throne. This youth lived on a property at Ouglich, willed to him by his father. Godounof saw to it that his interests were not neglected in this quarter, and among Dmitri's entourage there were several tools of the Regent. Their observations led Boris to assume that if this boy lived there would be an end to all his ambitions. Godounof laid his plans accordingly. On a May afternoon in 1591

young Dmitri was playing in the courtyard of his palace. He was suddenly missed. The stories of his assassination vary, but the one usually accepted relates that Dmitri's corpse was discovered in the church. Seven years later Feodor breathed his last, supported in the arms of his wife and his Regent, Boris, who had long since attained to something like absolute power, now saw that the throne could easily be his. "The Russian annalists," says Prosper Mérimée,* "who were no doubt ignorant of the Scottish legends, represent Boris as a new Macbeth driven to the crime by the prophecies of his soothsayers." Having told him that he would one day reign, they paused in terror at what they read in his future. He would reign, they added timorously, but only for seven years. "What matter if it be but seven days," cried Boris, "so long as I reign."

As occupant of the throne, the consequences of his crime never ceased to pursue him. A Pretender arose who claimed to be Ivan's son Dmitri. He had a large following, and was seized upon by the Poles as a convenient instrument in the promotion of their revolt against Muscovy. With the trouble at its height, Boris found himself on the horns of a ghastly dilemma. He wished his son to reign after him. If Dmitri was really alive his own son would never be Tsar. If his terrible design of years ago had been properly carried out, as he had always supposed, he must himself be a murderer, and with a conscience grown livelier that thought was unbearable.

* "Les Faux Démétrius," Paris, 1853.

IX.

Moussorgsky's music-drama does not show us the assassination. We do not see Dmitri's bloodstained corpse. But we get more than a glimpse of Boris's remorse-stricken soul, and we are allowed to obtain a fairly broad survey of the national mind.

That this was intended to be the main business of Moussorgsky's "National Music-Drama" is plainly shown by the arrangement of his dramatic material. Before the "plot" is entered upon there are two scenes constituting a prologue. By this means the ostensible as well as the real position as between monarch and people is revealed. Boris, invited to place himself on the throne, guilefully dissembles and demurs. His subjects, coerced at the instigation of Boris's own minions, simulate an anxiety lest the chosen Tsar's reluctance be maintained. A significant episode is the entrance of the mendicant pilgrims (*Kalieki perekhojie*), whose sacred hymn is received with an enthusiasm that is real. The people have been allowed to express themselves. In the second scene news of Boris's acquiescence arrives. It is followed at a short interval by the Tsar himself, who, passing across the Red Square to the Kremlin, is greeted by the crowd assembled for his coronation. So far the text is of Moussorgsky's making. When proceeding to the discussion of the main plot, he is able to draw upon Pushkin's original literary substance.

The first scene of Act I is laid in the cell of the monk Pimen, who is engaged upon the concluding

pages of a chronicle of Russian history. From him the young novice Grigory Otrepief learns the details of Dmitri's assassination. His discovery that the murdered Tsarevich would have been his own age makes him at once the victim and the hero of his imagination. He becomes the self-appointed avenger of the murdered Dmitri.

Scene II shows him a fugitive defying ecclesiastical authority. He has renounced the cloister and has taken his first step towards the throne. He is resting at an inn situated on the Lithuanian frontier. At the moment of his betrayal by two bibulous monks, he escapes through the window and continues his journey towards Poland.

The royal palace is the scene of the second act, which is the joint work of Pushkin and Moussorgsky. The presence of the Tsar's son Feodor and his daughter Xenia is made a vehicle for the interpolation of appropriate material of an episodic kind. The actual drama is carried a step further by the Tsar's reference to a map of Russia, which is being examined by his heir. "All this territory," explains Boris to his son, "will one day be yours." The atmosphere of domesticity is dispelled by the entrance of the boyard Shouisky, who brings news of serious trouble on the Polish frontier. It has been declared that the corpse found at Ouglich was not that of Dmitri Ivanovich; and that he, on the contrary, is a living and energetic claimant of the crown. Boris, uneasy, orders an immediate inquiry into the conduct of the assassination. Shouisky, as though to reassure him, describes

the appearance of the child's corpse, which he claims to have seen. On his withdrawal Boris is seized with terror. The rack upon which his mind has for years been tortured has been given a sharp turn by Shouisky's recital, and the strain produces a nerve-crisis. Boris, through a hallucination, has a vision of the blood-stained corpse. An awful terror seizes him.

X.

The next act is one which might well have been omitted from the scheme, and in performance often is. It was inserted, it will be remembered, to make good the deficiency of feminine interest. Dramatically it has a sort of relation to the whole, since it is complementary to the information brought by Shouisky and shows what is happening in Poland. Musically it is not uninteresting, but, considered as a part of the whole music-drama, it is as much a blemish as is Glinka's Polish Act in "A Life for the Tsar." Glinka's weakness of invention is shared by Moussorgsky. Both of them failed in the musical portrayal of Poland, because neither was able to describe the Polish character in musical terms other than those of the popular national rhythms.

The act has as definite a foundation in history as any other section of the drama, but it is negligible to the working out of this particular plot. Otrepief has arrived in Poland and has found a supporter. He has also found a maiden whose attachment to him is not altogether dictated by her heart. Her aim is to share

the throne of Russia, and she is striving to strengthen his ambitious hopes, knowing that upon them depends her chance of realizing her own. Both Marina Mnichek and her religious director, Rangoni, the Jesuit, are well known to history. As witnesses of their scheming, we feel that this act is at least a little helpful to our understanding of the drama. But the music, in its attempts to procure local colour, is far from convincing.

The fourth act is in two scenes. In the first the arrival of the Pretender at the forest of Kromy, *en route* for Moscow, is the only feature of dramatic value. But Moussorgsky's musical treatment of the behaviour of the utterly irresponsible crowd of peasants, who welcome the Pretender's passage rather as a pretext for revolt than as any real blessing, is a page which in itself creates an epoch in the history of Opera. The "pure fool" left behind on the stage to wring his hands in anguish at the darkness that is falling upon Russia is the creation of Pushkin. It is a national type which lives again in Dostoievsky's "Idiot."

The final scene is apparently a continuation of that in which we left Boris vainly trying to shut out the awful vision of the murdered Prince. The Tsar's Council, confident that the revolt of which Shouisky has apprised them will be quickly suppressed, are discussing the form of punishment to be meted out to the Pretender. Suddenly the terror-stricken figure of the Tsar bursts into the hall. With difficulty they calm him. Shouisky enters, and announces that he has found one who can give a faithful account of the Ouglich crime, and thus dispose of the Pretender's

claim. Pimen is ushered in. He tells of an old shepherd, blind from birth, who heard in a dream a command that he should pray at the tomb of Dmitri, now an angel, and whose faith was duly rewarded with the gift of sight. Boris hearing that his guilt is established, falls into a worse frenzy. He feels that his end is near. Young Feodor is sent for, and with his last breath the Tsar proclaims him his heir and successor.

XI.

The choice of "Boris Godounof" as subject would appear, as has been observed, to have been directly inspired by Glinka's use of historical material in "A Life for the Tsar." The music, however, is that of a composer who, after earnestly conferring with Dargomijsky, found little difficulty in seeing eye to eye with him in regard to the main principles of the "New Russian School."

The setting of "Boris Godounof," considered in comparison with all other operatic music, stands right apart from it. It is the artistic product of a great national crisis. One can easily imagine that a man so passionately in earnest as Moussorgsky would be immensely inspired by the so-called "nihilist" movement, and that nothing would please him more than to write an opera that would reflect the spirit of that movement.

It was the endeavour of the young intellectual of that time to be natural. There was a crusade against "pose," and not merely deliberate but unconscious pose. One could dismiss the score of "Boris" with a compliment well worth the paying by declaring it

an opera in which every bar of music is natural. Listening to the work, one could imagine Moussorgsky never to have heard an opera, to be entirely ignorant of the traditions of this form of art. With the exception of the Polish Act, in which he seems to betray that for him, as for Glinka, the vocabulary of musical terms in which the Polish character could be rendered stopped short at the Polacca and Mazurka rhythms, the composer has given us music that is appropriate, sincere, and dignified, never departing from beauty and never approaching anything in the nature of conventional pattern.

When it has been said that the music is consistently natural, it seems hardly necessary to mention that there are none of the traditional operatic subdivisions or self-contained numbers, that there are no formal overtures or *entr'actes*. The Prelude is of sufficient length to establish the requisite atmosphere. That done, the curtain rises. When it falls, the music, being there for a purely dramatic purpose, ceases. When, as in the case of Grigory's escape from the Inn, there is a likelihood that the scene will continue in the imagination of the spectator for a moment or two after the action is shut out from view, the music comes to his assistance, but it has a curtain of its own, and this too is quickly drawn.

XII.

By Moussorgsky the leading-motive device is very happily used. His leading-motives are flashes of thought, mere reminiscences. There are the usual

labels for characters and sentiments, but they are used in moderation. There is nothing resembling the Wagnerian philosophical disquisitions upon the attributes of a character on its every appearance, or upon the ethics of an emotion whenever suggested. Moussorgsky's themes are used chiefly as links connecting the series of tableaux of which the drama is made up, and not as labels inseparable from the persons to whom they have been attached. The most prominent motive—that associated with the idea of the royal succession, heard in the dialogue between Pimen and Grigory when the latter asks what age the murdered Prince would have been; in the Introduction to the Inn scene heralding the presence of the novice-Pretender; in Shouisky's account of the Ouglich crime and other places—does not at all times accompany reference to the subject it represents. Although it appears occasionally in the Polish scenes, there are places in which it might have been used quite effectively but in which it is neglected. Other themes recurring with more or less frequency and subtlety are the People's motive, which is heard in an altered shape in the Forest scene when the crowd is baiting a captured noble; the short phrase which seems to refer to Russia's past and which appears at intervals during the scene in the old monk's cell, returning with Pimen's narrative in the last act; and those which apparently represent the sentiments and attributes of the Tsar, his paternal solicitude and his insatiable ambition. That the full power of the leading-motive device was recognized by the composer is plain from the use of

one of the Polish themes, when in the Forest scene the Pretender speaks of his destination. Here the main motive occurring under the words: "To our holy land of Russia . . . let us seek the Kremlin" is heard in conjunction with a fragment of the Polacca. These two are heard together also in the Polish act.

The avoidance of formalism that characterizes the use of the leading-motive is in accord with the note of the whole work, simplicity. The moments of mental stress, the dramatic crises, are not with Moussorgsky the signal for a marshalling of "every modern luxury," as Glinka styled the instrumental array. In this respect we find economy where extravagance usually prevails. Even in the scene of the hallucination, the composer depends mainly upon his "strings" for the description of Boris's anguish. With him the repeated reference to an emotion does not involve an ever-increasing volume of tone for the description of the growing complexity in the psychological situation. Thus Boris's final fit of terror is accompanied by music infinitely simpler than that heard when first allusion is made to the murdered heir.

The vocal line of the opera partakes for the most part of the nature of melodic recitative, but its purely lyrical moments are by no means sparse. As they occur in places where reference to folk-lore and song is made, they constitute no exception to the general appropriateness. There are times when Moussorgsky feels called upon to bring the sound into very close accord with the general sense; it is then that the composer resorts, as in the story of the parakeet, told by

the excited young Tsarevich Feodor, to a method used in some of his songs. This consists of a faithful yet musical reflection of the rise and fall of the speaking voice. Set up as an ideal by Dargomijsky, it was attained by his disciple.

Moussorgsky was not deliberately unconventional as an operatic composer. National music-drama, if it is to exert the powerful influence without which it is not national, must be natural. Moussorgsky adopted the means best suited for the maintenance of that naturalness which alone could achieve what he has achieved. The music follows the drift of the text, serving it faithfully and never seeking to assert its claim to beauty as music. The sound, as M. Marnold so happily expresses it, is never allowed to become egotistical.* But, in accordance with the canons of the "New Russian School" it never ceases to be music.

"KHOVANSHCHINA"

XIII.

It was a Russian who said that religion was given by Providence as a stick which, in default of intellectual qualities, might be used as a moral support, and that with this stick Russians had chosen to belabour each other. The human interference which brought about the misuse of the stick was that of Nikon the Patriarch, who in 1655 undertook a revision of the Bible. Some of the corrections gave offence to the people, who preferred to adhere to traditional

* "Musique d'autrefois et d'aujourd'hui," Dorbon-Ainé, Paris.

methods of worship. In consequence of this the nation was split into two main religious bodies: the Old Believers and the Orthodox, or followers of the authoritative dispensation. The dissenting body subsequently became subdivided into a great number of "jarring sects."

It is with this schism that Moussorgsky's second historical opera concerns itself. The figure-heads of the opposing factions, for the purposes of the opera, are Prince Ivan Khovansky, an adherent of the old régime, and Prince Galitsin, whose sympathies and interests are served by the introduction of Western enlightenment. It is understood that Dositheus, who in the opera is the spiritual leader of the Old Believers, is a portrait of another Prince. Stassof, who was responsible for the suggestion that this "antagonism between old and young Russia" would be good material for an opera, may well have feared, as in a letter to Moussorgsky he confesses he did, that instead of being a "People's Music-Drama" it would be a Princes'.

The love-interest in "Khovanshchina" was not, as it had been in "Boris Godounof," an afterthought. There are three prominent feminine characters: the Old Believer, Martha, described by Stassof as in some ways resembling Potiphar's wife; Susan, a rigid fanatic, priding herself overmuch on her virtue; and Emma, a young Lutheran by whom Khovansky's son Andrew has been attracted. In the original plan there were to have been included the figure of the Empress-Regent Sophia, of whom Galitsin is supposed to have been the lover, together with her young charge, after-

wards to become Peter the Great. Owing to Moussorgsky's decline in health, and the consequent fear that his opera might never be finished, he was obliged to reduce its scheme, and the royal personages disappeared.

The historical events underlying the dramatic material of "Khovanshchina" are as follows: Feodor Alexeyevich, eldest grandson of the first Romanof, had died without issue and was succeeded by Peter, the third brother, Ivan, being of weak intellect. As Peter was only ten years old Sophia, their half-sister, was appointed Regent. Anticipating the unwelcome reforms for which Peter afterwards became famous, Sophia did her best to place Ivan on the throne, and to this end instigated a revolt of the Streltsy—a regiment of Guards most of whom were Old Believers. Their leader, Prince Khovansky, and his son Andrew were the moving spirits in the rebellion, and Peter, who subsequently succeeded in quelling it, gave to the series of risings the appellation of "Khovanshchina." The culminating event was the collective suicide of a large body of Old Believers who refused to submit to the heretical innovations of one whom they believed to be anti-Christ.

XIV.

Moussorgsky's libretto is a fairly faithful rendering of the historical records, but its hurried abridgement naturally caused a sacrifice of many interesting details. The opera, in its published form, begins with a scene in the Red Square at Moscow. It is early morning.

A public letter-writer enters the Square and sets up his booth, and a number of Streltsy who have been bivouacking in the Square after a riot on the previous evening betake themselves to their duties. Presently the boyard Shaklovity enters, and calls upon the scrivener to write down an impeachment of the Khovanskys, father and son. Immediately on his departure the pompous Prince Khovansky arrives with his following of Streltsy and Old Believers. Making the most of his position as head of the Streltsy, he encourages the people to rise against the authority of Peter. The crowd, impressed by his arrogance, sing a hymn in his honour. As the procession is moving off a young woman rushes upon the scene, closely followed by Khovansky's son. It is Emma the Lutheran, who is being importuned, to her evident distress, by Prince Andrew. The altercation is interrupted by the arrival of Martha, whom Andrew has discarded. Andrew, furious at her intervention, attempts to stab her, but the Old Believer, gaining possession of his knife, delivers a mystical oration in which she foretells the young Prince's approaching doom. The elder Khovansky now returns and, perceiving that the object of his son's attentions is a young woman whom he himself admires, gives orders for her arrest. Andrew vows that she shall not be taken alive. She is saved by the timely entrance of the venerable Dositheus. He upbraids Andrew, orders Martha to protect Emma under her own roof, and kneels in prayer. The crowd proceeds to the Kremlin for worship, and the curtain falls on the solitary figure of Dositheus.

The second act takes place in the palace of the Galitsins. The rising curtain discloses the Prince disdainfully perusing a love-letter from the Empress-Regent. To him enters Martha, whom he has summoned, believing in her powers of clairvoyance, to read his future. She calls for a basin of water, cloaks herself in a long black garment, and proceeds to divine his early ruin. Beside himself with rage, Galitsin calls for his servants and orders them to waylay the woman on her way home, and to drown her in the marshes.

Galitsin, pondering over Martha's terrifying prediction, is now visited by his enemy Khovansky. Between them there are personal and political recriminations, which terminate on the entrance of Dositheus, who pacifies them. The calm is but temporary. Martha returns to announce that an attempt has been made on her life, and is followed by Shaklovity, who presents himself as the envoy of the Regent and warns Khovansky that the Tsar has discovered his plot.

The Streltsian quarter of Moscow is the scene of the third act. Martha, withdrawing herself from a procession of Old Believers, seats herself on a mound near the Khovansky palace, and sings reminiscently of the days when young Andrew's heart was hers. She refers once more to the mysterious fate awaiting him.

Susan now discloses herself. She is scandalized by the passionate references to Andrew she has overheard, and reviles Martha for her shamelessness. Dositheus enters and brings peace once more on the scene. He

rebukes the old fanatic for her harshness, and comforts Martha. Night falls, and Shaklovity arrives and puts up a prayer for his harassed country.

There follows a sudden rush of Streltsy, followed by their plainly discontented wives. During the turmoil the letter-writer enters breathless, bringing news of the defeat of a Streltsian force at the hands of Peter's men. A call is made for their leader, and Prince Khovansky counsels them from the steps of his palace to submit for the nonce to Peter's rule.

The fourth act has two scenes. The first shows the interior of Khovansky's country mansion. The old Prince is seeking distraction in the songs of his attendant maidens. A messenger from Galitsin, conveying news of a plot against Khovansky's life, is scornfully dismissed, and the master of the house calls for his Persian dancers. At the conclusion of the entertainment Shaklovity brings a command that Khovansky shall appear at the Regent's council. Imagining this to be a sign of returning favour, the Prince makes ready for the journey, but as he approaches the door he is stabbed. His terrified servants flee from the sight of their prostrate master, and Shaklovity, surveying the corpse, breaks out into derisive laughter.

Scene II represents a public square in Moscow. Through the crowd is seen the figure of Galitsin, who is being hurried under close escort into exile. Dositheus joins the throng, and hears from Martha that Peter has ordered the wholesale execution of the Old Believers. Their leader resolves that death shall be self-inflicted. Andrew Khovansky, ignorant of his

father's assassination and of the general turn of events, now appears on the scene, and entreats Martha to deliver up the young Lutheran. He is told that Emma is honourably united to the man she loves, and in his consternation Andrew threatens Martha with death at the hands of his Streltsy. She bids him proceed with his threat. His repeated horn-blasts are answered in unexpected fashion by a body of his men, who, guarded by Peter's soldiers, are bringing axes and faggots to the place chosen for their execution. It does not take place. Peter's merciful decree of pardon is delivered to them by a herald.

The Old Believers' hermitage in a wood near Moscow is the scene of the fifth and final act. There, under the leadership of Dositheus, preparations are being made for a self-administered martyrdom. Andrew, still hoping to find Emma, is prevailed upon by Martha to mount the pyre, to which she then applies the brand. The Old Believers sing their hymn until the flames overpower them. The trumpets of Peter's soldiery are heard, and the curtain falls to the music which symbolizes the rising of the new Russia from the ashes of the old.

XV.

As drama, "Khovanshchina" is better planned than "Boris Godounof," despite the summary curtailment to which Moussorgsky was obliged to subject the work. On the dramatic side it possesses perhaps in a greater degree the quality of nationalism; the consequences of the Nikonian revision have a greater

significance for the larger public than the misdemeanours of Boris and Otrepief. In the matter of construction, the difference between the two works is principally in respect of detail. Moussorgsky has abandoned, in "Khovanshchina," his rigid adherence to the method of "throughout-composition"; there are repetitions which reveal an intention of seeking a compromise between an allegiance to the principles of his School and the desire to use a beautiful melody more than once. "Khovanshchina" is, in a word, slightly more "operatic" than "Boris Godounof."

The principal characters are again represented by themes, and here one observes that in their repetition there is just a shade more deliberateness. The motive most frequently used is that of the massive figure of Khovansky, than which it would have been impossible to conceive anything more appropriate.

A remarkable feature of the score is the wealth of music of an ecclesiastical kind. Already in "Boris" Moussorgsky had shown a complete mastery of the ancient modal method of writing. In "Khovanshchina" he achieves some of his most successful pages when composing chants for the Old Believer chorus.

A cardinal point of difference between the music of "Boris Godounof" and that of the later work is that, whereas in the former the lyrical pages are, as it were, mostly ornamental, in "Khovanshchina" they are part and parcel of the vocal line. The inclusion in "Boris" of the Clapping Game, the Nurse's Song of the Gnat, and the Inn-keeper's Song, is perfectly legitimate, as they are relevant to the dramatic action.

But they are decorative; they are part of the folk-colour. In "Khovanshchina" there are a few identifiable specimens of folk-song, such as Martha's song in Act III, the hymn to Khovansky in the country-house scene, and a fragment sung by the sleepy strelets immediately following the curtain's first rise; but their folk-origin is not betrayed, as are those of the earlier work, by their text. They are used where original music would have served as well, and the allegory of the folk-text fits into the dramatic situation.

XVI.

There are several numbers of great beauty in "Khovanshchina" which might easily be given a separate performance. First among these should be mentioned the Persian Dances. Among some of the composer's friends they were looked upon as an unwarrantable interpolation. The assumption that old Prince Khovansky had among his household some Persian captives was too slender an excuse for this music. Hearing it, one is quite prepared to give Moussorgsky the benefit of the doubt. The dances are introduced by a few anticipatory phrases; by this means the composer avoids the break which would have given them more the appearance of a ballet included as a sop to the orthodox opera-goer. The Song of the Haiduk (Hungarian mercenary), sung by Khovansky's serving-maids immediately before the Persian Dances, is also exceedingly charming; it is obviously traditional. The choral song in honour

of Khovansky, in the first act, is highly appropriate music, and could hardly have been improved upon as a means of suggesting the attitude of his followers towards the Prince. In singling out one from the many fine specimens of music of a devotional kind, it is upon the chorus of Old Believers in the last act, written in the Phrygian mode, that the choice must fall. The wonderful Song of Divination ought not to need mention as one of the numbers detachable from the score, since that is often given on the concert-platform.

"Khovanshchina" seems to merit a place apart in the field of Russian Opera. It is a fusion of the Glinkist and Dargomijskian traditions in that it deals with national subjects, incorporates the folk-idea, both literary and musical, and is designed and constructed on lines which are favourable to the development of a rational type of opera; in such an opera the severity of declamation is relieved on suitable occasions by melody, and a compromise is thus reached, admitting of the treatment of any literary subject at all suitable for the purposes of opera.

"Khovanshchina" is a work in which such a compromise becomes imperative. But for its acceptance the store of Russian national music-drama would have been robbed of an example that makes a direct appeal to the religious as well as to the patriotic sensibilities of the Russian nation.

PART III

CHORAL AND INSTRUMENTAL WORKS

I.

A SURVEY of Moussorgsky's dramatic work reveals so many evidences of genius in writing for chorus that one might have expected to find among his compositions a greater number of independent choral examples. Of the four surviving specimens, only one was designed as a separate work—"The Destruction of Sennacherib," after Byron's short poem, for the usual vocal quartet. This was written in the winter of 1866-67, and first performed at a Free School Concert under Balakiref's direction. One cannot say more than that its music, while making no strong effort at description, is entirely suitable to the text. Of the others, the chorus for mixed voices and orchestra (the sole remaining number of the setting of Sophocles' "Œdipus"), and a women's chorus from the unfinished "Salammbô," are not of great importance. "Joshua," also originally from that source is, on the other hand, a work of particular interest. It is founded on themes that the composer heard sung by some Jews, for some time neighbours of his, during the Feast of Tabernacles. In this Moussorgsky has imitated a style altogether new to him, showing a wonderful sensibility to new impressions. The melodic line is remarkably characteristic; its only blemish is an instrumental reproduction of an

ornamental flourish, introducing an effect of clearness foreign to the traditional Hebraic vocal style. A comparison of some of the melodic figures with those employed in the sketch of the two Jews in "The Picture-Show," suggests that Moussorgsky based his character drawing therein upon the material from which the "Joshua" music had been derived.

"THE PICTURE-SHOW"

II.

With one exception Moussorgsky's compositions for the piano can have little interest other than that arising for the historian. With this very notable exception none of them would for a moment arrest the attention of a musician if published under an unknown name.* The extraordinary novelty and originality of the famous series of sketches called "The Picture-Show" is attributable to its having been created under the influence of a deep inspiration.

Unfortunately it is impossible at this date to obtain any notion as to the degree of success attained by the composer in reproducing in music what he saw in Hartmann's sketches. While it has been possible, with a little contriving, to see the original pictures of Goya, and to hear their musical reflection according to Granados, or to witness the ridiculous miming of "General Lavine," and to listen to Debussy's account

* A further exception may perhaps be made in favour of the "Intermezzo," composed in 1861, and afterwards arranged for orchestra. It was partly inspired by a rustic scene, but was written in a classical style not at all suggesting a "programme."

of his mannerisms on one and the same day, the chance of comparing Moussorgsky's pieces with the water-colours and sketches that inspired them is apparently lost for ever. But the listener whose imagination enables him to connect the music with Hartmann's titles is not likely to care whether or no a sight of the originals would diminish his pleasure.

Hartmann, an architect, was a great friend both of Stassof and Moussorgsky. The son of a doctor, he was born in 1834, and despite his short life managed to visit practically all the art centres of Europe in search of ideas. On his death in the summer of 1873, Stassof wrote an extremely eulogistic notice, following this up with a sketch of his acquaintanceship and transactions with the lamented artist. In the spring of 1874, an exhibition of water-colours and designs was arranged, and it was Moussorgsky's visit to the gallery that led him to attempt what must have been then regarded as a particularly daring experiment.

Writing to Stassof in June, 1874, Moussorgsky states that "Hartmann" is progressing at the same furious rate as did "Boris" a year or so before. The first four numbers of the suite had then already taken shape.

The following is a slightly abbreviated translation of Moussorgsky's description of the pictures, printed in the original edition of his suite. Only a few of them are mentioned in Stassof's notice of the exhibition:

1. "Gnomus." Picture representing a little goblin, hobbling clumsily along on his misshapen legs.
2. "Il Vecchio Castello." A medieval castle, before which sings a troubadour.

3. "Tuileries." Children wrangling over their games in the Tuileries Gardens.
4. "Bydlo." A Polish cart on huge wheels, drawn by oxen.
5. "Ballet of Chickens in their Shells." A sketch for the staging of the ballet "Trilby."
6. "Samuel Goldenburg and Schmuyle." Two Polish Jews, the one prosperous, the other needy.
7. "Limoges." Bickering market-women.
8. "The Catacombs." Hartmann is seen visiting the Paris Catacombs by lantern-light.
9. "The Hut on Fowls' Legs." A design for a clock in the shape of Baba-Yaga's hut. Moussorgsky added the trail of the witch, journeying to and fro in her traditional mortar.
10. "The Bogatyr's Gate at Kief." Hartmann's plan for the proposed Gate in the ancient massive Russian style, with a cupola in the form of a Slavonic helmet.

There is a Prelude under the title "Promenade," the theme of which is used to suggest from time to time the gait of the visitor, and also the impression made upon him by the pictures.

The most graphic numbers in the series are undoubtedly "Gnomus," in which the grotesque little goblin's awkward movements are wonderfully suggested, "Bydlo," a scene in the street of Sandomir (recalling that it was Hartmann who advised including the Polish Act in "Boris," of which the castle at Sandomir is the scene), the "Trilby" movement,

daintiness itself, the Polish Jews, whose contrasted condition is marvellously depicted, the Baba-Yaga scene, and the splendidly heroic final number—a little masterpiece that is in itself an excellent memorial of the co-designer of the Russian Millennary monument at Nijni Novgorod.

The Spanish picture, the Tuileries scene, and "Limoges," are somewhat too formal for their purpose, and come strangely from the composer of "The Nursery." "The Catacombs" is a curiously fantastic number, part of which is based on the "Promenade" theme.

Now that these pieces have become popular, one regrets all the more that the pictures of Hartmann were not reproduced in the original edition—their inclusion could not greatly have lessened the value of Moussorgsky's work, and would have provided, in conjunction with the music, a fitting souvenir of an exceptionally versatile artist.

"NIGHT ON THE BARE MOUNTAIN"

III.

The surviving orchestral version of Moussorgsky's famous "Night on the Bare Mountain" is the work of Rimsky-Korsakof, and thus cannot be considered, apart from its thematic and programmatic interest, as representative.

Its history is a little complicated. Composed in the rough in 1867, as a fantasia for piano and orchestra, supposedly under the influence of Liszt's "Dance

Macabre" and Berlioz' "Witches' Sabbath," and given the title of "St. John's Eve," it was thrown aside until some three years later, when on Gedeonof's "Mlada" project being put before Moussorgsky and his friends Cui, Borodin, and Rimsky-Korsakof, it was considerably altered and was given a vocal part. It had now become the music for the revels of Chernobog (the Black god) on Mount Triglaf. On the abandonment of Gedeonof's scheme it was once more laid aside, to serve again for "Sorochinsk Fair" as the "fantastic dream"—an Intermezzo in which the witches are seen disporting themselves on the Bare Mountain. The ringing of the bell which disperses the nocturnal spirits at dawn was inserted at this time. Finally it was revised and orchestrated by Rimsky-Korsakof, who, after considerable trouble in arranging the material satisfactorily, eventually conducted it at the first of Belayef's Russian Symphony Concerts, about five years after the composer's death. Its immediate popularity is easy to understand, since the fantastic programme is carried out with a wealth of rhythmic and harmonic suggestion that compels a mental reconstruction of the supernatural occurrences described. The verbal description of the scene, attached to the score, is as follows: "Subterranean sounds of unearthly voices. Appearance of the spirits of darkness followed by that of the God Chernobog. Chernobog's glorification and the Black Mass. The Revels. At the height of the orgies is heard from afar the bell of a little church, which causes the spirits to disperse. Dawn."

The fantasia possesses a special significance for the student of Russian musical history. It recalls that Glinka had mooted, somewhere about the time of Moussorgsky's birth, the notion of composing a number of orchestral works in which he proposed removing the accepted formal restrictions in order to offer to the public a kind of music that could be appreciated by its (musically) uneducated section. The fantasias in question were to preserve such a level of seriousness as would render them acceptable to the critical, but by means of a " programme " were to make a popular appeal. " A Night in Madrid " may thus be looked upon as a forerunner of " A Night on the Bare Mountain," and the latter as the first of a series of symphonic pictures of which Rimsky-Korsakof's " Sheherazade " and " Antar," Borodin's " In the Steppes of Central Asia," Balakiref's " Tamara," and Glazounof's " Stenka Razin " are the most meritorious examples. " A Night on the Bare Mountain " must therefore be attributed as much to Glinkist as to foreign influence.

PART IV

SONGS

I.

BEFORE proceeding to make detailed reference to Moussorgsky's songs, it should be mentioned that the composer did not look upon a song as a vocal solo with instrumental accompaniment. He was just as unwilling to do so as he would have been to regard an opera as a "concert in costume." For him, the song was a vehicle for the description of something not to be described by any other means. His songs are best considered as musical scenes with a vocal part, the voice naturally becoming prominent where description gives place to narration or dialogue. In order to facilitate reference to the style of Moussorgsky's forty-odd examples, their stylistic attributes may be roughly specified under the following heads: (1) National or Popular: Where the text possesses a national character or appeals to nationalistic sensibilities, or where the music is in the style of folk-song. (2) Poetical or Idealistic: Where the text is based upon a poetical idea and the music is "absolute" rather than suggestive, reflecting the general sentiment of the whole rather than the particular meaning of a phrase. (3) Realistic: Where the text possesses the attributes of a *genre* production and the music occupies itself for the most part with description. (4) Declamatory: Where the text is in the nature of a narration and the vocal music is

mostly recitatival. (In this class of song Moussorgsky has not hesitated to alter the bar-design or measure wherever the syllabic structure of the text has demanded such variation.) Even this generous allowance of categories takes no account of the satirical pieces in which there is the purpose of ridiculing certain persons, types, or ideas, and which in two cases have been conveniently and appropriately described as "musical pamphlets."

II.

In the first, or national, category comes one of Moussorgsky's best-known vocal works, the "Gopak." The stirring words of the martyr-poet Taras Shevchenko are set melodically, with a fitness that could not have been surpassed had this sublime Ruthenian patriot himself, and not a Muscovite, been responsible for the music. The invocation to the Dnieper, also the work of this poet (he is buried on its banks), while national in character, is musically of quite a different order from the first. Beginning with a recitatival introduction in freely varied rhythms ($\frac{7}{4}$, $\frac{6}{4}$, $\frac{3}{4}$), a folk-song character prevails throughout the sombre Allegro. The final section, a return to the introductory theme, is a magnificently eloquent appeal to the Ruthenian river, the two bars in which the name is pronounced being lengthened to $\frac{7}{4}$ to admit of due emphasis.

"To the Mushrooms" is another song which may well be cited in this category, for the folk-song element is here also very conspicuous. It is national in text as well as music—mushroom-picking being in Russia made the occasion of a special ceremonial. The refrain has

a strong melodic resemblance to the song of the Innkeeper in "Boris Godounof." The "coda," which is at greater length than Moussorgsky usually allows himself, is a masterly piece of harmonic variation.

The "Peasant's Cradle Song" is in an entirely different mood. The mother sings in turn of the oppression that will be her child's lot, and of the Divine solicitude that may lighten the burden. The music suits itself wonderfully to the change of sense; only the rocking is constant.

The most characteristic examples among Moussorgsky's realistic songs are "The Orphan" and "Savishna." Both of them are sheer strokes of genius, not merely as to their general conception but in respect of their composer's happy disregard of tradition at a moment when the consideration of form would have prevented a fitting illustration of their textual idea. The first represents a street beggar imploring charity of a passer by. "Oh, kind gentleman, take pity on a poor, miserable, homeless orphan. . . ." The child describes the conditions of his existence; he has no strength left. ". . . To die of hunger is terrible . . . my blood is frozen . . . have pity on a miserable orphan. . . ." The music has simply spoken and moaned with the child; the misery described for us by its harmony might have softened the heart of the passer by; yet it fails. . . . The child is left standing, as an incomplete cadence tells us. Charity, like its resolution, is missing.

The orphan's appeal, while hardly more than a monologue, has a suggestion of melody. In

"Savishna" Moussorgsky approaches more closely the declamatory style. It is a monotonous supplication, the melodic element being restricted to three notes in a rhythm of five.

The composer, occupied in writing the "Labourer's Cradle Song" during the period spent on his brother's estate at Minkino, in 1865, happened to overhear the addresses of a half-witted suitor paid to the village beauty. It is the love-declaration of Vanya, the "yourodivy" or spiritual fool—the prototype of the pathetic creature who utters the closing words of the Kromy scene in "Boris"—that Moussorgsky has noted down in "Savishna." Its harmony strikes but two notes. The fool asks for love and for pity. The empty fourths and fifths in the closing three bars proclaim the hopelessness of his suit.

For the gibes of "The Urchin" Moussorgsky has used the same rhythmic arrangement, but in this case he varies his rhythm, using as occasion demands $\frac{6}{4}$, $\frac{5}{4}$, $\frac{3}{2}$ and $\frac{3}{1}$ to emphasize the variety of epithets flung by the ragamuffin at the old woman he is mocking. The $\frac{5}{4}$ rhythm is retained for her remonstrance, but the strength of her arm is made manifest in a couple of strenuous bars—for the chastisement.

"SONGS AND DANCES OF DEATH"

III.

We have passed from the category of realism into that of declamation without referring to the *genre* type. To this heading belongs undoubtedly the song-cycle entitled "Songs and Dances of Death." The

"Trepak" ("Still is the Forest") contains the elements of nationalism, realism, and melody. To the dance rhythm, to which Death conducts the starved peasant into eternity, is given a considerable prominence as a suggestion of Death's mood. Its measure is only blotted out by the howling of the tempest. Becoming audible once more at the promise of eternal peace, it mingles with the cradle-song that lulls the peasant into a last sleep. Death surveys the corpse with a smile at the recollection of his artifice.

There is little vocal melody in Moussorgsky's portrayal of the heart-rending scene that follows. A mother's tired voice has crooned through a sorrowful all-night vigil over her sick child. There is no conventional cradle-song. The movement is suggested by the rise and fall of a figure which appears to represent the weary woman's anxiety. The swaying becomes feebler. The mother turns her head. Someone is stealthily approaching the hut. There is a knock. Through the doorway the trembling mother sees, silhouetted by the light of dawn, the terrible intruder whose presence betokens that she can hardly dare hope. The gentleness of Death's accents fails to hide his intention. He will rock the child and afford the mother a well-earned respite. His voice will soothe the sufferer. In vain she refuses, protests, implores. Death gains possession of the little sufferer. "See! I have sung him to sleep. . . ."

The third picture is that of a frail young woman to whom Death appears in the guise of a gallant. Its refrain is a serenade. The sinister cavalier prosecutes

a brief and horrible courtship. For him there can be but one reply. A pedal note proclaims that his flattering utterances are but a veil that will not long obscure the end. It comes in the rhythm of the serenade . . . with it for a moment is heard the counsel of submission. A horrible silence follows. Death casts away his disguise. "Thou'rt Mine!" The means by which Moussorgsky attains to positive descriptiveness at no sacrifice of the lyrical quality are so absolutely simple that, were this song divorced from its text, one might seek in vain for anything in the nature of poetic suggestion. Yet as a complement of the words of Kutuzof, the music becomes a masterpiece that is second to none of its kind.

The method of the last number is somewhat different. The poet has given a more generous description of the *mise en scène*. Death has found a worthy vicar and is not yet here. The scene is a corpse-strewn battle-field. The conflict is recalled by its human remnants. Presently the rising moon reveals the hideous figure of a skeleton whose bones reflect its light. He is mounted. It is Field-Marshal Death. His subtle strategy has brought him an easy and an overwhelming victory. He sings the restrained song of a warrior who has never doubted his strength. To the dead he dispenses sophistries. "In life you were always in conflict. Death will unite you. . . ." To a military music he bids his victims rise and pass before him in review. Surveying the ghostly army, he promises that he will awaken them daily to entertain them at a midnight revel.

"Without Sunlight"

IV.

"Apart from Pushkin and Lermontof," wrote Moussorgsky to Stassof, "I have not discovered elsewhere what I find in Kutuzof." In the "Songs and Dances of Death" there is sufficient evidence that the composer had found someone capable of inspiring the very best he could create. In the second cycle, which may be classified as Idealistic, there is so clear a representation of the composer's own personality that one could almost credit him with the text.

"Without Sunlight" is a collection of six poems by the poet of the "Dances of Death"; their musical setting shows that Moussorgsky was capable, on occasion, of being subjective, that the capacity for introspection and self-revelation was not altogether foreign to his nature. In all his other creations he is seen looking around him and depicting objects worthy of admiration or pity, or deserving ridicule. In "Without Sunlight" he has given us music that represents himself as surely as the text represents the psychology of the type to which he conforms.

In all six numbers the vocal part approaches nearer to definite melody than to melo-declamation. But in connection with the last one only can the term lyrical be mentioned.

The first, "Within Four Walls," is a glimpse through the door of a hospital. The soliloquy of a patient is overheard. His mental eye fixes momentarily upon some past happiness. Its gaze shifts to the present,

and the sick one realizes that this is solitude and night. There is little movement in Moussorgsky's harmonies; it is as though all sound were, like the room, in shadow.

"In the crowd thou didst not know me," is the complaint of the second song, which is the record of a passion starved by neglect. The recollection brings a sharp reminder of the first pangs of disappointment. Here, as in "The Orphan," the return to the prevailing tonality is neglected.

"The Festal Days are Over" is also in reminiscent vein. The sufferer is wakeful, and in the dead of night turns over the pages of a distant past, rendered more vivid by solitude. The accompaniment is of a much more pictorial kind than that of the foregoing numbers. The passage in which the poet speaks of "vernal passions of the past returning as phantoms in dreams" is accompanied by a figure which has since served Debussy in depicting his nocturnal "*Nuages.*"*

"Tedium" is unrelievedly pessimistic. Cynical self-damnation is its note. It catalogues all life's joys and decrees that they are to befall one insensible: "Tedium until the very tomb, and God be with you there." At the opening of the song the harmony seems to fail in reflecting the full weariness of spirit described by the text, but once the exordium is done with there is no further doubt as to its fitness. Poignant bitterness permeates the music until the final words, which evoke a major chord.

* A similar coincidence of musical invention, relating to the same composers, may be observed by comparing passages in "La Chevelure" (Trois Chansons de Bilitis) and the "Galitsin" Act of "Khovanshchina."

There is a harmonic wealth in the "Elegie" that is not forthcoming from any of the previous numbers. It is also of much more generous dimensions, and is at times quite rhapsodical. The text once more concerns past emotions to which the music seeks to attune itself. At one moment there is positive description. At "the sound of the bells of death," the accompaniment is suspended and the knell introduced.

"On the Stream," the last of the series, does not merely suggest the abstract sentiment, but is definitely pictorial, so far, that is, as concerns the water alone. This is depicted in a constant triplet figure. The text tells us that death will soon put an end to these solitary communings, and the voice of the sufferer answering the call with a cheerfulness that strikes a new note is heard in an ascending phrase borne on the bosom of the still rustling stream into the unknown.*

A closer relation with the import of these vocal poems would have been established by the use of such a title as "Songs Before Death."

"THE NURSERY"

V.

"The Russian child," says M. d'Alheim, "whether belonging to the peasant or the middle class, only differs from the child of another nationality in the matter of racial traits."† This difference, however, as revealed in the child-scenes of Moussorgsky, assumes a not inconsiderable importance. The Russian child

* The text of this song was also set to music by Balakiref.

† *Op. cit.*

resembles other children in that he is father to the man; but both child and man live in a world singularly different, in one particular, from their Western prototypes. They spend their lives in a world from which the supernatural element has not been banished. It is introduced by the nurse through the medium of the folk-stories in which the Russian, whether child or man, delights. By their own confession Pushkin, Moussorgsky, and Rimsky-Korsakof have made us aware that their oft-displayed affection for legendary lore was instilled into them by the trusted peasant-woman under whose care their childhood was passed.

To this influence the world owes several of the national poet's immortal works, and the operas and symphonic pieces founded upon them by such as Glinka, Dargomijsky, Rimsky-Korsakof, and Moussorgsky. The child's request, in the first number of "The Nursery," for a tale concerning certain legendary personages whose behaviour is, to say the least of it, a little uncommon, needs no further explanation. A Russian, hearing the words, would in imagination be immediately transported, as though by the good offices of some benevolent *genie*, to his native heath. This little vocal scene has a special claim to be quoted as a specimen of art-nationalism, showing as it does the extent to which a popular affection for folk-lore will contribute to a form of art which may be wooed but cannot be won by the less imaginative peoples.

The misdemeanours of Mishenka, left for a moment to himself, are not perhaps distinctively national. A nursery "strewn with a fearful mess of cotton,

wrecked stitching, and all the contents of the nursery work-basket, to which a bottle of ink has contributed even greater devastation,"* is a scene which must surely be common to the nurseries of the civilized world. In contradistinction the third and sixth numbers reflect the very special interest that the zoological creation has for the Russian child. The one describes Mishenka in conflict with a too venturesome cockchafer, and the youngster's mystification in the presence of Death; the other relates how the caged robin escaped, through the timely interference of Mishenka, from the teeth and claws of Matros the cat.

The fourth, fifth, and seventh concern respectively a doll, the child's evening prayer, and a gallop round the nursery astride a stick. The doll is exhorted to remember the dreams of its slumber in order that they may beguile the waking hour; the prayer is rendered characteristic by an episode—the child's lapse of memory on approaching the passage in which Divine grace is solicited on its own behalf; the furious gallop during which the nursery is "transformed into a veritable battlefield"†—the furniture sustaining heavy casualties—is a marvellous example of "the notation of pantomime."

In "The Nursery" the declamatory method prevails. In the vocal part there is even less suggestion of melody than in "The Orphan" or "Savishna." Moussorgsky never turns aside from his intention of giving us the child's speech. The nearest approach to

* M. Montagu-Nathan, *op. cit.*

† From a notice by M. Debussy.

melody is in " The Child's Prayer," in which there are to be found some repeated phrases. But these are nothing more than a suggestion of the mechanical way in which the prayer is uttered. The words come not from his mind but his lips.

With the accompaniment it is otherwise. In such numbers as " The Cockchafer," " The Doll " (a cradle-song), and " The Hobby-Horse," there is a clearly defined rhythmic pattern and a sufficiently formal structure to allow of music that could be divorced from its text. It must surely have been these numbers that caused Liszt to consider an arrangement for piano alone. One cannot imagine that any sort of coherency could have been infused into " Nurse, Tell Me a Tale," with its twenty-seven changes of time-signature !

" The Nursery " is a work of art in which the principles formulated by Dargomijsky have been carried to their logical conclusion. It is the equivalent in its special sphere of " The Matchmaker." The setting of that comedy was held by the composer to represent his " very self." But as the text of " The Nursery " is Moussorgsky's own, we may consider it for that reason alone as still more representative. Besides revealing the genius it shows us the man.

As a series of child-pictures it stands alone. It is doubtful whether in the whole world of art its equal as an exposition of the child could be found. " Moussorgsky," says M. Combarieu, " is no onlooker; in depicting the children he himself returns to childhood; one might say that he plays with them and sulks with them. . . ."*

* *Revue Musicale*, January, 1911.

SATIRICAL SONGS

VI.

The category of "Satirical," like the classification of "Pamphlet," is one which takes no heed of the musical qualities of the example thus placed. "The Seminarist" is satirical, but in contradistinction to "The Peepshow" must be called non-political. Musically speaking it is declamatory, but has a certain rhythmic pattern. So long as the divinity student attends to his Latin lesson he sings in an appropriate monotone; when his mind wanders towards the thought of his instructor's daughter the vocal contour is softened. As this happens quite often, "The Seminarist" possesses a musical interest that would have been absent had the student been of saintly character.

"The Classicist" is both satire and musical politics. Its victim, Famintsin, a contemporary critic, was a lover of Handel and a stern opponent of all "modernist tricks." "The Classicist," in ridiculing these prejudices, takes on the appearance of a *pastiche*. In one line we are listening to innocuous Handelian music; in the next to the detested "modernist tricks." After the quotation from Rimsky-Korsakof's "Sadko," which does not strike us as appalling cacophony, "The Classicist" becomes itself again, establishing an atmosphere of repose suitable to a *milieu* in which music reflecting the contemporary spirit is taboo.

"The Musicians' Peepshow" belongs obviously to the same category. Its satire is more biting, its political sphere somewhat wider, and quotations

abound. But neither "The Classicist," nor "The Peep-show," nor the Mephistophelean "Flea-song" is in the least representative of Moussorgsky's art, however much they may tell us about that of other folk. Still, they are documents that help to increase our knowledge of the man, and they have the one great merit of being exceedingly entertaining.

The present description of the text, method, and general treatment of the songs dealt with cannot possibly convey any definite idea of their musical quality. From the preceding notes it will have been gathered that the range of material employed by Moussorgsky was exceedingly wide, and the method of treatment extraordinarily varied. It will have been realized, moreover, that the composer set before himself an ideal which made immense demands upon both the imagination and the inventive faculty.

For many famous composers a song need claim nothing more than to be a poem set to music. The accompaniment is a complement of the vocal line and has little bearing on the text. In Moussorgsky's songs we have a new type—they constitute a form of art in which all three constituents, the text, the vocal line, and the piano part, have a truly vital function, contributing directly and equally to the artistic whole.

LIST OF PRINCIPAL PUBLISHED WORKS

MUSIC-DRAMA.

Boris Godounof.
Khovanshchina.
The Matchmaker (First Act).
The Fair at Sorochinsk (fragments).

ORCHESTRA.

A Night on the Bare Mountain.

CHORAL.

The Destruction of Sennacherib.
Joshua.
Œdipus.
Women's Chorus from abandoned opera Salammbô.

PIANO.

The Picture-Show (Tableaux d'une Exposition).
A number of small pieces.

SONGS.

The Orphan.
Yeremoushka's Cradle Song.
Labourer's Lullaby.
Night.
The Classicist.
The Peepshow.
The Dnieper.
The Seminarist.
Savishna.
Gopak.

SONG CYCLES.

Without Sunlight (six numbers)
The Nursery (seven numbers).
Songs and Dances of Death (four numbers).

INDEX

Alexander II., 45
Alheim, d', 26, 91
Antar, 82
Azanchevsky, 16

Balakiref, 18, 19, 20, 21, 26, 28, 37, 44, 47, 76, 82, 91
Beethoven, 15
Belayef, 81
Berlioz, 21, 81
Betz, 32
Bogomolof, 44
Boris Godounof, 16, 19, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 41, 42, 46, 49, 53, 54-66, 67, 72, 73, 78, 79, 85, 86,
Borodin, 17, 18, 20, 23, 26, 34, 37, 44, 47, 81, 82
Byron, 28, 76

Calvocoressi, 51
Central Asia, In the Steppes of, 82
Chansons de Bilitis, 90
Chernishevsky, 24
Children's Scherzo, 22
Classicist, The, 37, 45, 95, 96
Combarieu, 94
Cui, 18, 19, 20, 22, 26, 27, 34, 37, 38, 47, 53, 81

Dargomijsky, 16, 18, 19, 20, 25, 26, 27, 29, 32, 8, 43, 47, 49, 50, 52, 53, 54, 62, 75, 92, 94
Death, 31
Debussy, 77, 90, 93
Demidof, 16
Dnieper, 84
Don Juan, 49
Dostoievsky, 61

Edwards, Sutherland, 50
Ensigns' Polka, 15, 23

Famintsin, 37, 38, 95
Ferrero, 32
Field, 14
Filippof, 44
Flaubert, 25, 46, 48
Flea-song, 6, 96,
Free School of Music, 41, 44,76

Gedeonof, 33, 54, 81
General Lavine, 77
Glinka, 19, 20, 26, 31, 32, 46, 47, 55, 56, 60, 62, 63, 65, 75, 82
Gogol, 26, 27, 28, 29, 40, 50, 51, 53
Golden Bird, 26
Golenishchef-Kutuzof, 42, 43, 88, 89
Gopak, 6, 54
Gopak (Song), 29, 84
Granados, 77
Gunsburg, 44

Han d'Islande, 16
Handel, 95

Hartmann, 33, 39, 77, 78, 79, 80
Heine, 49
Herke, 14, 15
Holbein, 43
Hugo, V., 16

Impromptu passionne, 22
Ivanovsky, 23
Ivan the Terrible, 56

Joshua, 76

Kallistrate, 25
Karamzin, 31
Karatigin, 48, 54
Khovanshchina, 16, 34, 35, 40, 41, 42, 46, 66-75, 90
Kondratief, 35
Kroupsky, 16

Leonof, 41, 42, 43
Lermontof, 22, 89
Life for the Tsar, A, 19, 46, 55, 60, 62
Liszt, 14, 21, 80
Lyadof, 21, 34, 54

Maid of Pskof, 33
Manjean, 32
Marnold, 66
Matchmaker, The, 26, 27, 29, 30, 49-53, 94
Mendelssohn, 23
Mérimée, 57
Minkus, 34
Mlada, 34, 54, 81
Moussorgsky, Filaret, 13, 24, 45
Mozart, 19
Mushrooms, 84

Napravnik, 32
Night, 25
Night in Madrid, 82
Night in May, A, 53
Night on the Bare Mountain, 28, 34, 54, 80-82
Nikolsky, 31, 33
Nursery, The, 38, 42, 43

Obolensky, 16
Œdipus, 21, 76
Opochinin, 31, 33
Orfano, 16
Orlof, 16
Orphan, The, 29, 85, 90, 93
Oulibishef, 19

Patti, 38
Peasant's Cradle Song, 85
Peepshow, 6, 38, 95, 96
Peter the Great, 68
Petrof, 35
Picture-Show, The, 39, 77-80
Polejaef, 49
Popof, 17
Pourgold, Alexandra, 29
Pourgold, Nadejda, 29
Prince Igor, 17
Pushkin, 13, 31, 49, 58, 61, 89, 92

Rimsky-Korsakoff, 11, 18, 20, 22, 28, 29, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 41, 42, 44, 47, 53, 80, 81, 82, 92, 95
Rogneda, 38
Rubinstein, A, 21
Russalka, 18
Russian Musical Society, 21, 37
Russlan and Ludmilla, 42

Sadko, 37, 95
Salammbô, 25, 46, 48, 49, 54, 76
Savishna, 85, 86, 93
Schumann, 21, 23
Seminarist, The, 29, 95

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